

JOSÉ MÁRCIO CORREA

LAYING THE QUEEN OF SPADES:

THE AUTHORIAL GAMES IN *WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?*

Dissertação apresentada como requisito parcial à obtenção do grau de Mestre. Curso de Mestrado em Letras, área de concentração de Literaturas de Língua Inglesa. Setor de Ciências Humanas, Letras e Artes, Universidade Federal do Paraná.

Orientadora: Prof.ª Dr.ª Brunilda Tempel Reichmann

CURITIBA
1995

22-267

Yes, I have tricks in my pocket, I have things up my sleeve.

Tennessee Williams

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In order to reach this high I have stood on the shoulders of giants. During the last few years I have grown increasingly indebted to a group of fantastic people who have showed the way, served as examples, given support and shared their knowledge in their own distinct ways. Some of them I cannot fail to mention, as a token of gratitude.

Chronologically speaking, I should start by thanking my teacher and friend Lúcia Billerbeck, then Kazuko Inoue (God bless her), Cláudia Barbosa and Antonio Teixeira, among other inspiring lecturers from my undergraduate days at UEPG.

After my first introduction to the MA course at UFPR by Mail Marques de Azevedo, I was honoured by having friendly masters and masterly friends like sceptical Plínio Smith, interdisciplinary Thomas Beebee, linguistic Wolodymyr Kulczynskyj, and aesthetic Maria José Justino. I also relied on the sustained guidance from the shining minds of professors Anna Camati, Regina Przybycien and Sigrid Renaux.

Most of all, no one is more directly responsible for this achievement than Brunilda Tempel Reichmann, my professor, adviser and fairy godmother, and I hope I have been a good apprentice, one deserving of all the kindness and attention she devoted throughout.

I would still like to show how grateful I am to my classmates Regina Cabreira and Nilo Rocha, the best of friends, for making the three last years such a pleasant experience. Finally, this study would not have been possible without the financial assistance provided by CNPq.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
ABSTRACT	vi
RESUMO	vii
CHAPTER I	1
GAMES AUTHORS PLAY	1
1.1 INTRODUCTION OR A LONG NIGHT'S JOURNEY INTO DAY	1
1.2 PLAY AND GAMES.....	13
CHAPTER II	19
THE CARDS AND THE PLAYER	19
2.1 DEALING THE CARDS	19
2.2 PLAYING THE DOUBLES	20
2.3 IN THE HALL OF MIRRORS	29
2.4 PLAYING THE GAMES.....	36
2.5 ENDGAME.....	47
CHAPTER III	52
THE WEAVING OF THE ENIGMA	52
3.1 OPPONENTS AND TEAMMATES	52
3.2 THE VOICES IN THE TEXT	53
3.3 ECHOES OF OTHER VOICES	54
3.4 JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS OR "THE STORY OF THE THREE PIGLETS"	65
3.5 MORE THAN WORDS	69
3.6 THE VOICE OF TRUTH.....	70
3.7 TWO PLAYS IN SEARCH OF GUESTS	76
CHAPTER IV	81
THE GAME OF THE WORD	81

4.1	SIGNALLING THE GAME	81
4.2	THE BATTLE OF WITS	83
4.3	A DEVIL WITH LANGUAGE	90
4.4	GUNS AND FAME	91
4.5	WORD GAMES.....	93
4.6	SERIOUS JOKES.....	121
	CHAPTER V	124
	THE GAME OF THE UNREAL.....	124
5.1	THE GAME OF FICTIONALITY.....	124
5.2	THE MANY FACES OF REALITY	126
5.3	REAL TEARS FOR AN IMAGINARY CORPSE	133
5.4	BUILDING A BOND.....	135
5.5	THE GAME OF "ANALYSING THE AUTHOR".....	143
5.6	THE CHILD MADE OF WORDS.....	145
5.7	INVITATION TO A MURDER.....	150
5.8	A FUNNY REQUIEM.....	152
	CONCLUSION.....	155
	BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES.....	162
	OTHER WORKS CONSULTED.....	178

ABSTRACT

This investigation consists of the survey and analysis of the authorial games employed by Edward Albee in his play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, according to the categories developed by Peter Hutchinson in *Games Authors Play*. The main objective was to demonstrate how the pervasiveness of the ludic elements in the play, in any of its forms (dramatic text, theatrical performance or filmic version) had been largely neglected by detractors, and even by admirers, leading to a misunderstanding as to the conventions employed by the author. Some critics then produced charges of misogyny, of disguised homosexuality, of lack of originality (claiming the play was an imitation of Strindberg's *The Bond*), and of ineffectiveness of its end. In order to prove that such "accusations" were undeserved, I analysed the ludic element in four different aspects of the play: the characters and their relationship, the structuration of the text, the dramatic dialogue, and the thematization of the relation reality/fiction. Given the variety of the areas approached and the lack of a single method of game analysis, each chapter makes use of specific theories. The analysis of the characters, their relationship, and their psychological games, mainly by means of the theory proposed by Eric Berne, revealed a division between metafictional characters conscious of their own performance, and a corresponding intrafictional audience. A similar division was found in the textual analysis performed in Chapter III, along the method proposed by Roland Barthes—the structuration based on two major enigmas suggests the existence of a play within the play, showing the narcissistic bend of the work. The analysis of intertextuality was complemented by a study, in accordance with Andrew Kennedy's approach, of the dramatic dialogue and word games, in Chapter IV, which confirmed the play's double-layered structuration and self-consciousness as artifice. If the previous chapters denied the naturalistic classification of the play, the last one shows how the interplay of reality and fiction is thematized and exploited in the figure of the mythical child. By means of Rabinowitz's study of the audience and perception of art, I find the symbolic and parodic relevance of that device, thus demonstrating that *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* in fact does not imitate, but rather parodies, the naturalism of Strindberg. So the misconception behind the above-mentioned charges is exposed, and the play is seen as sharing many of the characteristics of the contemporary development of post-modern aesthetics, which suggests a re-evaluation of its merits and those of its author's.

RESUMO

Esta dissertação contém o levantamento e análise dos jogos autorais empregados por Edward Albee em sua peça *Quem tem medo de Virginia Woolf?* segundo as categorias desenvolvidas por Peter Hutchinson em seu livro *Games Authors Play*. O principal objetivo foi o de demonstrar o quanto foi negligenciada a profusão do elemento lúdico na obra (quer na forma de texto, de peça teatral ou na versão filmica), tanto pelos seus opositores quanto por admiradores, o que levou à interpretação errônea das convenções artísticas empregadas pelo autor. Vários críticos chegaram a alegações de misoginia, de homossexualismo disfarçado, de falta de originalidade (acreditando que a peça fosse uma imitação de *O Vínculo* de Strindberg), além de ineficiência do final. A fim de demonstrar o desmérito de tais “acusações,” procedi à análise do elemento lúdico em quatro aspectos diferentes da obra: os personagens e seu relacionamento, a estruturação do texto, o diálogo dramático e a tematização da relação realidade/ficção. Devido à variedade das áreas, bem como à falta de um método único de análise de jogos, cada capítulo utilizou teorias específicas. A análise dos personagens, seu relacionamento e seus jogos psicológicos foi feita segundo a teoria de Eric Berne, revelando uma divisão entre personagens metaficcionalis cientes de sua própria condição de representação e outro grupo correspondente de espectadores intraficcionalis. Uma divisão semelhante foi verificada na análise textual desenvolvida pelo método de Roland Barthes. A estruturação baseada nos dois principais enigmas também indica a existência de uma peça dentro da outra, mostrando assim a tendência narcisista da obra. A análise da intertextualidade foi complementada com um estudo nos moldes da abordagem de Andrew Kennedy da linguagem dramática, e também dos jogos de palavras presentes, no Capítulo IV, que veio reafirmar a estruturação em camadas duplas da peça, bem como sua autoconsciência como artifício. Se os capítulos anteriores contradizem a classificação da peça como naturalista, o último nos mostra como a interação da realidade com a ficção é tematizada e explorada na figura do filho imaginário. O emprego do estudo de Rabinowitz sobre o público e sua percepção da obra artística permitiu a identificação da relevância simbólica e paródica daquele recurso, demonstrando desta maneira que *Quem tem medo de Virginia Woolf?* na verdade não imita, mas sim parodia, o naturalismo de Strindberg. Assim, fica exposta a concepção errônea por trás das “acusações” acima e observa-se que a peça compartilha de muitas características do desenvolvimento seu contemporâneo da estética pós-moderna, o que sugere uma reavaliação dos méritos seus e de seu autor.

Chapter I

GAMES AUTHORS PLAY

When the critics disagree the artist is in
accord with himself.

Oscar Wilde¹

1.1 Introduction or a long night's journey into day

Edward Albee's three-act play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* has proven a highly controversial work which critics tend to refer to in superlative terms from both ends of the evaluation spectrum, and disputes have extended for over thirty-three years. This, in itself, is a positive aspect to the play, if we agree with Oscar Wilde in saying that the vitality and complexity of a work of art are revealed in the diversity of opinion about it.²

After a row of Albee's shorter plays—namely *The Zoo Story*, *The Death of Bessie Smith*, *The American Dream*, *Fam and Yam* and *Bartleby*—*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* had its first performance in the Billy Rose Theatre in New York, on October 13, 1962, with the production of Alan Schneider. The audience was spellbound, and the characters, relationships and dialogue of the play were the topic of conversations in taxis and living-rooms. These discussions also reached the press; following the opening night of the play, the critic Saul Colin admitted to having “never spent such an emotionally and physically upsetting evening at a theatre.”³ Other newspaper reviewers were

¹ WILDE, Oscar. The Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex : Penguin, 1985).

² *Ibid.*

³ COLIN, Saul. “Who's Afraid of Edward Albee?” In: *Plays and Players*. [s.n.] London, March 1963.

just as emphatic when commenting on the impact of the play, pointing it out as an “irreplaceable experience,”⁴ towering over contemporary works, “the most shattering drama”⁵ since O’Neill, excoriating, riveting and unforgettable. The judgements of that impact, however, differed widely. According to Gottfried, the excitement of the play lay mostly on its cast—Uta Hagen, Arthur Hill, George Grizzard and Melinda Dillon—without whom the performance would have been “dull and stupid.”⁶ Driver goes even further to claim that the exhaustion felt at the end by both actors and audience are due not to their having experienced too much, but “from having pretended to experience it.”⁷

Nevertheless, from that night onwards, both the public and the critics found it increasingly difficult to remain indifferent to the phenomenon of *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. Detractors rose in number, but the play became an enormous success with the public and gave Albee a series of awards, including Most Promising Playwright of the Season, the New York Drama Critics Circle Award, Foreign Press Association Award, the Tony Award, Outer Circle Award, *Saturday Review* Drama Critics Award, *Variety* Drama Critics’ Poll Award and the *Evening Standard* Award. When its recommendation for the Pulitzer Prize was rejected by the advisory board because some members

⁴ *Village Voice*, quoted in the inside cover of ALBEE, Edward; *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* 1. Signet paperback printing (Harmondsworth, Middlesex : Penguin, 1983).

⁵ Richards Watts, Jr., for the *New York Post*, quoted in the inside cover of ALBEE, Edward; *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* 1. Signet paperback printing (Harmondsworth, Middlesex : Penguin, 1983).

⁶ GOTTFRIED, Martin. *A Theater Divided : the Postwar American Stage*. (Boston : Little, Brown & Company, 1967).

⁷ DRIVER, Tom F. “What’s the Matter with Edward Albee?” In: KERNAN, Alvin B. (Ed.) *The Modern American Theater : a Collection of Critical Essays*. (Englewood Cliffs, N. J. : Prentice-Hall, 1967). p. 99-103.

thought it was “a filthy play,”⁸ John Mason Brown and John Gassner, the proponents, resigned. It was later turned into a successful film by Ernest Lehman, with the direction of Mike Nichols and starring Elizabeth Taylor, Richard Burton, George Segal and Sandy Dennis.⁹ The film received two Academy Awards: Best Actress (Elizabeth Taylor) and Best Actress in a Supporting Role (Sandy Dennis).¹⁰

To say that *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* was the highest point in Albee's career would not do credit to the surprising turnabout caused by his next plays. If the former play had made him a celebrity, his adaptation of Carson McCullers's *The Ballad of the Sad Café* showed little theatrical value, and *Tiny Alice* marked his downfall. Openly criticised both as excessively complex—even though the author desperately protested it was very simple—and as a ridiculous philosophical and metaphysical exercise, *Tiny Alice* had only a very short run on Broadway, during which the discussion was never calmed down. Not even the raising of discussion can be claimed in favour of his second adaptation, James Purdy's *Malcolm*, and by the time of this “fiasco,” Albee had already come to be despised with the epithet “little,” after “Tiny Alice.” From reviews as America's most promising playwright, abreast with O'Neill, Miller and Williams, “Little Albee” tumbled overnight into discredit with the critics as

⁸ BIGSBY, C. W. E. *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama*. Vol. 2. 4. ed. (New York : Cambridge University Press, 1989).

⁹ For further detail on the film, see the list in the section “Other Works Consulted.”

¹⁰ In Brazil, the play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (*Quem Tem Medo de Virginia Woolf?*) was first performed in São Paulo, at the Teatro Cacilda Becker, in 1965, in the translation of Gert Meyer. In Rio, the play was performed in 1966, at the Teatro Maison de France, by the Maurice Vaneau Company. Before the cast was transferred to the Teatro do Rio, the main actress, Cacilda Becker (Martha) became ill and was substituted by Vanda Lacerda. (References provided by Jorge Uranga in appendix form for the Brazilian edition of Martin Gottfried's *A Theater Divided*). GOTTFRIED, Martin. *Teatro Dividido : a cena americana no pós-guerra*. Trad. Eglê Malheiros. (Rio de Janeiro : Bloch, 1970).

a “one-hit” writer. A split into two careers had occurred, a first phase of very exciting work and now a second, increasingly depressing. The latter went on to include *A Delicate Balance* (1967), *Everything in the Garden* (1967), *Box and Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung* (1968), *All Over* (1971), *Seascape* (1975), *Counting the Ways* (1976), *Listening* (1976), *The Lady from Dubuque* (1979), *Lolita* (adaptation, 1981) and *The Man Who Had Three Arms* (1982). Not even the two Pulitzer prizes awarded *A Delicate Balance* and *Seascape* could bring about a raise in his reputation. It was only very recently, after nearly thirty years, that Edward Albee’s position as a major playwright was reestablished, with the success of his two-act play *Three Tall Women* (1993), awarded the Pulitzer prize in 1994. His return to the limelight also suggests that the time is ripe for a reappraisal of his earlier work, including a reassessment of the critical dispute over *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, to which we presently return.

Even though it is considered a classic of the American stage, *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* has been criticised on various grounds, and the most recurrent charges are those of misogyny, of half-disguised homosexuality, of imitating Strindberg’s *The Bond*, and, most of all, of the damaging weakness of the imaginary-son device. The author himself rose to defend his play against those who saw it as anti-female. He contended that the character of Martha was “one of the most complete females that [he] had experienced in the theatre in a long time,”¹¹ and added that she was “worthy of sympathy, affection even and love.”¹² Baxandall agrees, saying that “Martha isn’t stupid [,] she is capable of criticizing her own actions, and she can be very affectionate [,] but she can have

¹¹ WAGER, Walter (Ed.). *The Playwrights Speak*. (London : Longmans, Green and Co., 1969). p. 25.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 25.

no realistic hope of becoming more than a Discontented Housewife.”¹³ In spite of that, many remained unconvinced. Others considered that what some viewed as an unsympathetic presentation of female characters was in fact the portrayal of the relationship between two homosexual couples, claiming for instance that “the reason that George and Martha cannot have children is because they are really men—homosexuals,”¹⁴ although Albee again insisted that such interpretations were absurd, to say the least.

Many seem to have regretted the play’s realistic form. After *The Zoo Story*, Albee had come to be ranked along with the proponents of the Theatre of the Absurd—and Martin Esslin himself was the first to stick the label on that play. Albee’s recently acquired fans had been expecting his next plays to follow suit, and were frustrated when *The Sandbox* and *The American Dream* made way to a more realistic, backward-looking, Broadway-style play. Instead of more experimental work, a *déjà-vu* sensation led them to think of a play like O’Neill’s *A Long Day’s Journey Into Night* warmed over for the audience of the sixties. Worse still, *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* appeared to be largely based on Strindberg’s naturalistic one-acter *The Bond*, written in 1892, in which a couple claw at each other in court for their only child, who never appears in the play and whom both lose. If the absence of the child in *The Bond* is hardly a bone of contention for the critics, the presence of the imaginary son in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* has achieved unanimity among the opponents of the play. Critics otherwise tempted towards praise sneer at what they call “a false

¹³ BAXANDALL, Lee. “The Theater of Edward Albee.” In: KERNAN, Alvin B. (Ed.) *The Modern American Theater: a Collection of Critical Essays*. (Englewood Cliffs, N. J. : Prentice-Hall, 1967). p. 91-98.

¹⁴ GOTTFRIED, Martin. *A Theater Divided: the Postwar American Stage*. (Boston : Little, Brown & Company, 1967). p. 266.

lead,” or “an artistic error,” whereas those more overtly annoyed speak of “an artificial climax” that does not work, or “a flaw that ruins the third act” or a “cheap and unconvincing theatre trick.”¹⁵

I would like to contend that the range of shortcomings pointed by the critics as presented above, in spite of their apparent variety, stem from a single source, namely the misunderstanding of critics and public alike as to the convention employed in the play and the author’s attitude towards that convention. The criticism departs from the supposition that the play was meant as naturalistic.¹⁶ Reviews and articles often stress at a very early stage its naturalistic or realistic¹⁷ style. From this viewpoint, the connection with Strindberg is an easy one, and Albee’s three-act play is seen as a pale imitation of *The Bond*, with its marital conflict of open mutual accusation. The next step is then the transference of Strindberg’s sex-war and misogynist stance to *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, followed by the blending with elements taken from O’Neill, such as drunkenness and madness within the household confines. As soon as the play is labeled “naturalist” its features seem to undermine its effectiveness. The climax with the revelation of Martha and George’s joint creation of an imaginary son becomes as incongruous with the otherwise realistic style of the play as a *deus ex machina* device. Consider, for instance,

¹⁵ These examples are expressions used by Garff Wilson, Lee Baxandall, Martin Gottfried, Tom Driver and Saul Colin (see Bibliographical References).

¹⁶ Naturalism is viewed here mainly as defined in the *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, under entries like “Naturalism” or “Naturalistic Drama.” The principles first set down by Zola are also clearly described in STYAN, J. L. *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice I: Realism and Naturalism*. 1. Paperback ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983). For further details, see the discussion in Chapter V ahead.

¹⁷ Naturalism is taken many times as a synonym for realism, as the critics of *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* tend to do, but the term is employed here as the convention that “seeks to mirror life with utmost fidelity” influenced by Zola and going beyond the realism of Ibsen in that it relied heavily on determinism.

the climatic scene of *The Zoo Story*. Seen in that light, the latter would seem just as incredible and melodramatic—a man impaling himself into the knife he had thrown to a peaceful citizen—but once that play is included in the absurdist tradition, the device of Jerry's suicide becomes more easily acceptable.

The objections are thus reduced to a question of artistic conventions. If we subscribe to the naturalistic view of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* there are just enough grounds for the critics' concern with the play's internal contradictions and the author's inability to structure his work properly; so we must reject the play as a failure, as Gottfried and others have done, and agree that it has received excessive, undeserved critical attention. But a closer look might prove that there are still more reasons to believe that such simplistic interpretation is wrong.

In the first place, the play is not a retrocess in relation to *The Zoo Story*. Throughout the first half of the century, a number of lines of development were exploited by playwrights: Naturalism, Epic Theatre, Symbolism, Expressionism, the Absurd, the Theatre of Cruelty, etc. Even authors who tried their hands at more experimental forms, sometimes opted for more traditional approaches, as O'Neill did in *A Long Day's Journey into Night*. After the success of his first play, Albee came to be ranked alongside the absurdist. But a closer look at *The Zoo Story* might reveal a different picture, for we either deem its "absurd" tame in comparison with the drama of Beckett or Ionesco, or we recognise that what Albee is trying to do is less to plunge headlong into the Theatre of the Absurd than to find a new form at its intersection with naturalism. It is possible that critics have opted for the former alternative because of the added justification that Albee's absurdism bent towards the American taste in drama rather than to European trends. But his new blend of

forms accounts for all that is still "realistic" in *The Zoo Story*. In this light, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, instead of a retrocess in form, constitutes a new experiment in such amalgamation, along with the former play but in a different mixture of the same elements.

We can easily agree that Martha and George's battle is reminiscent of Strindberg's naturalism, and that there are familiarities with O'Neill's family drama, but the treatment of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is totally different. The use of a more traditional form seems to have been intentionally set as a backdrop against which other aspects might stand out, which in turn explains why a device such as the mythical son rings so loud to many critics. In the speech of the characters, for instance, there is a tension of the means of expression strange to naturalism, and so is the role played by the guest couple. The hosts' attitude towards them also calls for an explanation beyond the limits of realistic portrayal.

Apart from a naturalistic interpretation, other approaches have been proposed in which the seemingly inconsistent elements are seen to have their justifiable function in the structure of the play. Several articles seek for the cohesive line of the play in its psychological level. Extensive analysis of the relationship between the characters has been carried out, as in Flasch,¹⁸ whereas others exploited their communicational patterns, like Watlawick *et al.*¹⁹ There is also provision in Watlawick *et al.*'s and Baxandall's²⁰ articles for a justification

¹⁸ FLASCH, Joy. "Games People Play in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*" *Modern Drama*, X (1967): 280-288.

¹⁹ WATLAWICK, Paul; BEAVIN, Janet H.; JACKSON, Don. *Pragmatics of Human Communication: a Study of Interactional Patterns, Pathologies, and Paradoxes* (London: Faber & Faber, 1968).

²⁰ BAXANDALL, Lee. "The Theater of Edward Albee." In: KERNAN, Alvin B. (Ed.) *The Modern American Theater: a Collection of Critical Essays*. (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967). p. 91-98.

for the fantasy-baby based on psychiatric evidence of such mythical constructs in real life. Schlüter,²¹ among others, demonstrates that George and Martha play a metafictional²² role, thus revealing a metatheatrical level to the play where the “kid” has its significance. Martin Esslin²³ dismisses the naturalistic in favour of more absurdist elements, making room for myth and fantasy. Other approaches, Allan Lewis’s²⁴ for instance, see an internal symbolic consistency in the form of a ritualistic game to which the mythical son is central.

Having in mind the insightful examples presented above, we are led to conclude that naturalism is an inappropriate label to stick to *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, and that it would be a fruitless task to strain the concept of naturalism so as to placate such obvious discrepancies. One can go as far as to say with Bigsby²⁵ that the play has a naturalistic “texture,” as opposed to an expressionistic style, but naturalism “implies a concern with surface exactitude which has nothing to do with Albee’s method.”²⁶ The author himself qualified the realism of his play as the sort of drama which faces “man’s condition as it is,”²⁷ which is a statement closer to Pinter or Beckett than to Ibsen or Strindberg. This “realism” needs no correspondence with a realistic

²¹ SCHLÜTER, J. *Metafictional Characters in Modern Drama* (New York : Columbia University Press, 1979).

²² Throughout the analysis, I will employ the terms “metafictional” and “metatheatrical” indistinctively, to refer to the self-conscious elements found in the play. Similarly, the term “fiction” is not restricted here to the fictional prose at all, but as a contrast to “real.” This strategy is essential to the discussion, for in many occasions the theories applied will be derived from studies of fictional prose, but equally valid for the theatrical phenomena, as we will see in the sequence.

²³ ESSLIN, M. *The Theatre of the Absurd* (New York : Pelican, 1983).

²⁴ LEWIS, Allan. *The Contemporary Theatre : the Significant Playwrights of Our Time* (New York : Crown, 1962).

²⁵ BIGSBY, C. W. E. *Confrontation and Commitment: a Study of Contemporary American Drama, 1959-1966* (University of Missouri Press, 1968). p. 86-87.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

representation, i. e., it belongs to content rather than to form, being equally possible to render it in an absurdist context, in an expressionistic setting or still an epic drama style.

Once free from the naturalistic straight-jacket, the movements of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* become more obvious, and expand towards other directions. The psychological and metafictional studies mentioned earlier have traced some of these routes, but we still lack an understanding of the play as a process capable of amalgamating such different influences and sources. Albee himself seems to offer a clue in the title of the first act—Fun and Games—and in fact the games in the play have been taken into consideration, by Lewis and Porter for example, but even these attempts fell short of recognizing the pervasiveness of the ludic²⁸ aspect and its relevance as a unifying element. Quoting George the character, we could say that they have got down to the bone but have not gone all the “way yet... there’s something inside the bone... the marrow... and that’s what you gotta get at.”²⁹

In order to get to the “marrow,” the approach of the present study takes the discussion from the point where such investigations stopped. By surveying and analysing the games in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, not only do I try to develop further the insights provided by similar studies as mentioned above, but also attempt to explore new fields. This study includes games not mentioned, or fully exploited, before. It also differs from preceding work in its approach, for rather than treating games as secondary devices in the play, it considers

²⁸ As a native speaker of Portuguese, I feel completely comfortable with the cognate adjective “ludic,” which I first saw in Peter Hutchinson’s *Games Authors Play* (London : Methuen, 1983).

²⁹ ALBEE, Edward. *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* 1st Signet Printing. New York: Penguin, 1983. p. 213. All other quotations from the play will refer to the same edition. The number of pages is the same in the Atheneum edition (see bibliographical references).

them the permeating substance that arbitrates the relations between the author and his work as well as between the author and his audience, and creates new levels of meaning. Just as Martha's and George's games open up the level of psychological interaction, others unfold metatheatrical realms, open doors to authorial intrusion and reader/spectator participation. So, the pursuit of the ludic aspects takes us to every corner of the universe of the play.

I arbitrarily split the investigation into four "fronts" of exploration and exploitation, which correspond to a certain extent to the four main sources of objections raised against the play—addressing mainly the characters, the textual³⁰ strategies, the language, and fictionality itself. Given the fact that those "fronts" differ widely in their characteristics, and that there is to date no established method of game analysis for the literary work, the approach adopted in this investigation will be very eclectic. Each chapter will have its own theoretical introduction preceding the analysis itself. The investigation opens with a study of the characters, their interaction and distribution, as well as their psychological and metafictional features—an effort in which I am aided by the theories developed by Eric Berne, Goffman and Schlüter. That is followed by a textual analysis aimed at the drama's mediation between author and reader/spectator, which is performed along the lines laid by Roland Barthes in *S/Z*, and also borrows from Umberto Eco, and Ben-Porat. In the next chapter, I rely mostly on Peter Hutchinson's survey of language games to focus on the language employed by the characters as a vehicle of play and as a game in

³⁰ By "text" (consequently "textual" and other related terms) I mean any combination of signs/symbols/indexes inclusive of but not restricted to the written media, so that text here includes the written form of drama as well as the theatrical performance, where the stage, props, language, lighting, acting, music, etc. are all texts themselves and part of the larger text, the play.

itself, but also draw from Kennedy's *Dramatic Dialogue*.³¹ Chapter V then tries to determine the interplay of fiction and reality in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* which the imaginary son epitomises. Here I will depend mostly on Rabinowitz³² as a reference. As the description has made clear, a broad range of theories and references will be played upon to compose a framework of analysis. When venturing on such shifting ground, I will depend basically on Hutchinson's insightful work *Games Authors Play* as map and compass. Besides that, in order to support my thesis about the pervasiveness of the ludic element throughout the play and its relevance for the re-evaluation of the conventions employed, I will sometimes be forced to make slight sacrifices in depth for the sake of breadth of range, which will in turn demand a corresponding willingness from the reader to expand horizons instead of digging deeper and deeper.

What follows is a discussion on the concept of game as a working instrument for analysis in general, before we approach each of the four different facets of the play. However, it still remains to be said that the division made is arbitrary and provisional, the parts will certainly overlap to some extent, only to be brought together into a whole at the conclusion of this work. The ultimate objective is to rectify some criticism that, in my view, is unfair in that it neglects important aspects and distorts the perception of the play, at the expense of the audience, who may be discouraged to see it, or influenced to overlook its complexity. By demonstrating that *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* mirrors in reverse the naturalistic conventions attributed to it—the same way it could

³¹ KENNEDY, Andrew K. *Dramatic Dialogue : The Duologue of Personal Encounter* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1983).

³² RABINOWITZ, P. J. "Truth in Fiction: a Reexamination of Audiences." In: *Critical Inquiry*, 4 : 121-41, 1977.

represent the more realistic *A Long Day's Journey Into Night* through the looking glass to complete the cycle of 24 hours—I hope to shed some light on the secrets of a play whose “structure and texture appear to have been insufficiently appreciated even by admirers.”³³

1.2 Play and games

Although it might at first seem clear what a game is, its definition is a matter of high complexity, for it has to provide for such widely different activities as animal playful behaviour, guess games, and the Olympic Games. In his study of the game as a cultural phenomenon, Huizinga³⁴ points out six characteristics that, according to him, make for a reasonably good definition.

First of all, the game is a voluntary activity, an utmost expression of freedom. Besides, it is performed within certain limits of time and space, which does not mean that it can not be played everywhere or at any time, but only that each kind of game has its own conventional ground and duration. Third, each game is played according to an absolute internal order, i. e., there are rules to which the players consent voluntarily, but which are absolutely obligatory. Another characteristic is its neglect of utilitarian values, for the game has an end in itself, the goal the player strives for but which needs not have any usefulness. The feelings necessarily involved are the tension of competition or expectation of an outcome, accompanied by a sort of enjoyment that pervades even the most serious forms of game, leading to total engrossment by both players and

³³ GASSNER, J. (Ed.) *Best American Plays : Fifth Series, 1957-1963*. 7. Ed. (New York : Crown, 1973). p. 144.

³⁴ HUIZINGA, J. *Homo Ludens : o Jogo Como Elemento da Cultura*. Trad. João Paulo Monteiro (São Paulo : Perspectiva, 1971).

audience. Finally, an essential feature of the game is that it consists in a suspension of "ordinary life," which all players are aware of, and act accordingly.

With very slight alterations, this set of characteristics applies equally well to other cultural phenomena, namely the ritual (either religious or not), festivals and the arts, and I feel tempted to emphasize its appropriateness to the theatre. Having originated from religious rituals, the theatre seems to be the quintessential realm of the ludic. The stage is a magic space that denies the logic of the outside world in favour of a set of conventions of its own, conventions that impose an order that absorbs both audience and players during a "break" from everyday life bracketed by the rise and fall of the curtains.

For the purpose of this study, we can accept the characteristics of games mentioned above, but have to make provisions for certain "variations." For instance, in the case of psychological games as defined and described by Berne and Harris,³⁵ the player does not join voluntarily, but is lured into the game; there is a pattern and a set of rules, but the participants are mostly unaware of them, and usually play their parts without even realising that a game is going on. Besides that, although there may be limits in time, such games often lack a definite "playground." In literary games, rules appear to be as flexible as to seem nonexistent, but that only on the surface. It is easy to understand that just as there are countless possible variations of the moves of the games within the range allowed by the rules, literary conventions and forms are constantly challenged within certain limits, without which the literary phenomenon would cease to be, by merging into another fact, event or activity. This flexibility of

³⁵ BERNE, E. *Games People Play* : the Psychology of Human Relationships (New York : Ballantine, 1964). HARRIS, T. *I'm OK, You're OK*. 1. paperback printing (New York : Avon, 1973).

the rules would lead us, therefore, away from a definition and towards a more fluid “family resemblance” that would identify games as such, in the words of Wittgenstein.³⁶ Or, to quote Rothstein: “any definition of a game is not a definition as such, but a catalogue of possible features of a game that might, at any given time, ‘crop up’.”³⁷

Games have always been present in culture (and even gave it its origin, if we agree with Huizinga), and given the amount of time, effort, interest, resources and even the lives that have been devoted to them throughout the centuries all over the world, the attention they have received from scientists and critics has been amazingly small. This is probably explained by the widespread view that games are not serious, and become, as such, an unsuitable subject of investigation. In cases when they were studied, however competently as in the case of Bakhtin,³⁸ it was usually as a part of a larger context, either philosophical, social, anthropological or psychological. The names that come to mind are, first, Nietzsche, followed by Wittgenstein, Huizinga, Caillois, and Lévi-Strauss. Another probable obstacle to research is the multifarious nature of games and consequent difficulties of even defining this subject of study.

So it is a revealing irony that games have really acquired full scientific status in a field of inquiry which primes on being exact, namely mathematics. The Theory of Games has since been adopted by other fields, usually those renowned for a concern with the most “serious” matters: economics, politics, warfare. In the economic sense, the studies firstly developed in 1944 has

³⁶ WITTGENSTEIN, L. *Investigações Filosóficas*. Trad. José Carlos Bruni (São Paulo : Abril Cultural, 1975).

³⁷ ROTHSTEIN, B. R. W. *Playing the Game : the Work of Tom Stoppard* (Rhode Island, 1979). PhD dissertation, Univ. of Rhode Island.

³⁸ BAKHTIN, M. *A Cultura Popular na Idade Média e no Renascimento: O Contexto de François Rabelais*. Trad. Yara Frateschi Vieira (São Paulo : FUCITEC, 1987).

recently led to a triple Nobel Prize, to Reinhard Selten, John F. Nash and John C. Harsanyi, in 1994.³⁹

Surprisingly, in literature, where the study of games has a vast field and clear relevance, very few full-fledged incursions have been made. But the interest in this area has increased, mainly after Berne's *Games People Play*, which influenced many studies on the psychology of characters. Having moved from the study of games such as baseball, included in novels or plays, to the interaction between characters, the time was ripe for a complete reversal.

In times when consideration has shifted from the text as product to the text as process, as indicated by Hutcheon,⁴⁰ it has become possible to employ the concept of game to the analysis of the relationship between an author and their audience. I have put forward a word above about the characteristics shared by the game and the theatre. Now, such comment also applies to the literary work in general. Consider the appreciation of a poem, which has a limitation in time and space, is engaged voluntarily by both author and reader, creates a tension towards understanding and enjoyment of the process, is devoid of an external purpose and consists in an interlude to everyday life.

Peter Hutchinson, in *Games Authors Play* (1983),⁴¹ explores the definitions and uses of literary games. He starts by discussing the meanings different authors attribute to "game" and "play," as well as their characteristics. Next, he reviews the history of previous approaches to games in

³⁹ ORTH, M. "Reinhard Selten: Prêmio Nobel pela Teoria dos Jogos." *Deutschland*. 6, dezembro 94. p.60-63.

⁴⁰ HUTCHEON, Linda. *Narcissistic Narrative : the Metafictional Paradox* (London : Methuen, 1984).

⁴¹ HUTCHINSON, Peter. *Games Authors Play* (London : Methuen, 1983).

literature. There follows the discussion of the features of literary play/game and the description of the most common ludic elements in literary works.

Hutchinson's working definition of literary game goes as:

any playful, self-conscious and extended means by which an author stimulates his reader to deduce or to speculate, by which he encourages him to see a relationship between different parts of the text, or between the text and something extraneous to it.⁴²

And he points out the characteristics of the literary game. Distinguishing between two levels inside the game, its activity and its purpose, he remarks that the activity has an end in itself, but the purpose includes "important practical significance,"⁴³ by which he means the relation established between the game and the other elements of the literary work. Besides, the literary game is also self-conscious and provocative, and aims primarily at amusing and dazzling.

Being in total agreement as to the above, I rely heavily on Hutchinson's work to perform the analysis that follows. But is there a justification for the use of the game analysis in an academic work on literature? The answer to this question lies in the fact that most contemporary literature has turned towards itself as process for a subject, which has led to extensive use of playful or ludic elements. Works such as *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* might become totally unintelligible or lose most of its significance if those elements are neglected. And, to add four arguments presented by Rothstein, who also explored the ludic aspects of literary works in a Ph.D. dissertation:

First, because people are familiar with games, a wider audience than the usual academic readership may be lured into the fascinations and insights of literary criticism. Students unacquainted with or averse to notions like "genre" or "evaluation" might be led to explore freely a work when they

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.14.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.12.

consider it as a game. Second, because games themselves range from the simple to the complex, one can attack a work through its games in lesser or greater detail, more or less deeply, more or less concretely. Third, because games have recognizable features, a critic can readily identify those features in a work, making analysis less mysterious and more available in terms of comparing two or more works. And because not every feature occurs or dominates in every game, one may easily highlight the most significant factor in the work. Finally, and perhaps most important, a game does imply fun, be it outright comedy or intellectual puzzle-solving. Too often scholarship accounts for its existence by assigning some kind of external value to itself. In addition to pedagogical, aesthetic, historical, political, or social value, there is in criticism the sheer amusement of it all.⁴⁴

There is a ludic element, therefore, to be found even in literary criticism, which does not mean it is less serious or less important. It can, and should, be productive as well, and I strongly believe that the discussion that follows will cast some light on some aspects of utmost importance to the understanding and appreciation of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Once it is based on recognizable features and only occasionally dives in the abstruse and specialized, I also expect it will be an agreeable experience for the reader. And, of course, I must admit that in performing this analysis I am playing a game, for the "sheer amusement of it all." You, my dear reader, have become part of this game, as my fellow player. So, let us proceed, for the game must go on.

⁴⁴ ROTHSTEIN, B. R. W. *Playing the Game: the Work of Tom Stoppard* (Rhode Island, 1979. PhD dissertation, University of Rhode Island). p.32.

Chapter II

THE CARDS AND THE PLAYER

He may play the Jack of Diamonds
He may lay the Queen of Spades
He may conceal a King in his hand
But the memory of it fades⁴⁵

2.1 Dealing the cards

The playing of cards may be employed as a rich metaphor in the analysis of various aspects of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, most notably in the way the author creates and uses his characters. In that sense, he seems to be dealing a set of four cards: The King of Clubs and the Queen of Spades waging war against each other; an intruder in the shape of a Jack of Diamonds who fights or plays out of ambition (the power and money represented by the diamonds); and a faint Queen of Hearts (which goes for her lack of brains). But the dealer of the cards has yet another card concealed up his sleeve: the bluff of an Ace, the imaginary child that haunts the stage and holds the power to tip the scales of the game.

Apart from that, the simile is also appropriate for the two-sidedness of the characters, who, like the figures in the cards, have two faces which look at different directions simultaneously. Or we might say that the second face, initially lying down, is shown as the cards are turned in the game, that is, as the characters are unmasked and their secret sides are revealed.

In the dispute of the sequence of games, we can follow Lewis in saying that “the single theme is worked out in complex variations[,] the characters are

⁴⁵ STING. “Shape of my Heart.” In: *Ten Summoner's Tales*. (Hollywood : A&M Records Inc., 1993).

arranged in all possible combinations,”⁴⁶ as if they were being shuffled again at each “round” of the game. The initial pairing of the couples, Martha-George and Nick-Honey, is altered in the first act when both women leave the stage together for the toilet upstairs, whereas the men are left to each other. These new, momentary alliances are rearranged again, in the second act for instance, to a couple exchange. Then the new couples are portrayed playing against each other, with Nick and Martha united in adultery and George and Honey in agreement as to the fiction of the telegram received. They finally resume the original pairing, however, in the end.

2.2 Playing the doubles

The relevance of the concept of “shuffling” dealt with above is twofold. First, it dismisses the misunderstanding of some critics as to the nature of the relationship between the couples. Garff Wilson, for instance, describes the play as an “all night drinking party during which *two couples ruthlessly and sadistically rip each other to shreds*”⁴⁷ (emphasis added). But we observe that the real battle is between George and Martha, the other couple being witnesses, victims or instruments of their war rather than opponents. Manifestedly, neither of the couples could be said to have won, or lost, which dispels the idea of a war between them. That argument also goes for the view of a war of the sexes, for the pairing of the characters never points towards an alliance of George and Nick against Honey and Martha or vice versa. The second benefit from

⁴⁶ LEWIS, Allan. *American Pays and Playwrights*. ([S.l.] Educational Theater Journal, 1964). p.89.

⁴⁷ WILSON, Garff B. *Three Hundred Years of American Drama and Theatre : From Ye Bare and Ye Cubb to Hair* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J. : Prentice-Hall, 1973). p. 487.

“shuffling” lies in the fact that the different pairings of characters point towards the similarities and contrasts both inside and between the pairs. Every combination entails a different situation, which then calls for the use of another mask⁴⁸ by the character, and at the same time that it poses the pair for comparison, it creates a different balance of power.

When the two couples face each other it seems as though they were looking at the distorting mirror at the funhouse. Nick and Honey can be said to stand for George and Martha’s past, when they were newly-weds starting in life together and in an academic career. The young couple thus represents their hosts’ dreams and aspirations, but also, in Bigsby’s words, “a warning of the next stage of decline.”⁴⁹ The older couple, on the other hand, offers the two guests an insight into what the future might hold in stock for them, an ironic warning about the sort of life they may be walking into unaware. The warnings are not only implicit, but even get voiced, as in this example from Act II:

George: I’m giving you good advice, now. [...] There’s quicksand here, and you’ll be dragged down, just as.... [...] ...before you know it... sucked down.... (p.115)

Nevertheless, the distortions in the mirror do not prevent the parallelism of similarity. Both wives have had something of a religious background (Martha’s family was religious, she has attended a convent, Honey’s father was a “man of god”), look up to their fathers and are childless; both men have an academic background, and all of them have two sides or faces—at least—like the cards:

⁴⁸ The term “mask” as used by L. Pirandello in “The Art of Humour.” In: *The Massachusetts Review*, 6 : 515-20, Spring/Summer 1965.

⁴⁹ BIGSBY, C.W.E. *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama*. Vol 2. 4. ed. (New York : Cambridge, 1989). p. 267.

one that represents a public side, the level of appearances, and another, hidden, private, that keeps secrets. If Nick only by drinking way too much would admit to having married into money and because of a supposed pregnancy, George cannot come to telling of his shameful past, i. e., of having destroyed his family; and both are extremely sorry and angered at the disclosure of such secrets. And whereas Martha holds on to a child that is no more than a figment of her imagination, the parallel in Honey's case extends even further, at a physical level, by her having contracted a hysterical pregnancy. These and other secrets become "trumps" to be played at strategic moments, when each card has its turn.

But as far as straight similarity is considered, that is just as far as the comparison of the couples would seem to go. From then on it would seem more suitable to talk of crossed analogies. In both couples there is a member of a dominant personality (in Martha's case, "domineering" would be the term), only it is at a crossed pattern, as Martha's character and appearance find a parallel not in Honey, but in Nick. Both share more than their fair amount of ambition, control and drive, and treat their partners as inferiors; Martha by despising and humiliating George, Nick by his overprotective, paternalistic attitude towards his wife. Martha and Nick are also much more physical than their spouses. She is described as "ample, but not fleshy" (p. 1), and he is "well put-together." Nick has been a boxing champion, and Martha has won her one match by knocking George down with a punch in the jaw (p. 56). Not only are they more physical and sensual themselves, but they are also the ones who revel in each other's looks. In Act I, for instance, as Martha returns downstairs to join the others after having changed into more comfortable and "most voluptuous" clothes, George comments more casually (as well as ironically): "There you are,

my pet” (p.47), whereas the words fail Nick as he rises, impressed, to utter: “Well, now. ...” (p.47). But there is more to their adultery in Act II than physical attraction; the reason underlying their affair is ambition, on Nick’s side, and thirst for revenge on her husband, on Martha’s, and that will be discussed further below.

Honey and George, on the other hand, contrast with their partners for being the weaker side on their marriages, both psychologically and physically. Honey is small and far from attractive. So much so that from the very start Martha describes her as “a mousey little type, without any hips, or anything” (p. 20). Later, in Act II, George refers to her as “monkey-nipples” and “angel-tits,” and even makes an ironic reversal of Martha’s former comment as he tells the story of the scientist whose “*mouse is a wifey little type who gargles brandy all the time ...*” (p. 142, emphasis added). George is also seen as thin and weak, a man whose wife can knock down, literally, and one of her speeches highlights those features:

George, here, doesn’t cotton much to body talk . . . do you sweetheart? (*No reply*) George isn’t too happy when we get to muscle. You know ...flat bellies, pectorals ... (p. 53)

And he tries to defend himself against an obviously disadvantageous comparison with Nick by claiming that he does not have a “paunch”:

What I’ve got . . . I’ve got this little distension just below the belt . . . but it’s hard . . . It’s not soft flesh. I use the handball courts. (p. 35)

Honey’s hysterical pregnancy, on the other hand, is also comparable to George’s frustrated attempt to publish a novel, and her avoiding conception relates in a way to his killing the only child he was able to produce. Another characteristic that links them is their tendency towards escapism. George

plunges into the past, i.e., into History as an attempt not to have to face reality, as in the scene where he reads a History book while his wife is “necking with” Nick; but that feature takes its ultimate form in Honey, for, “unwilling to confront the fact that in many ways ‘consciousness is pain’, she retreats into a childish dependence and, indeed, at one stage assumes the foetal position.”⁵⁰

The similarities between Martha and Honey were commented above, but it is their contrast that becomes more pronounced in their pairing in Act I. Honey is slimhipped, which brings into doubt her capacity to generate children, but even if she is fertile, she willingly avoids motherhood, out of fear. Martha, in contrast, is ample enough to bear many babies and desperately wants to, but cannot have them. To her foil’s overpowering independence and assertiveness, Honey contrasts frailty and childish dependence; to Martha’s practicality she presents a dreamlike attitude. Honey is not only unfit for reality, but does not seem to grasp the relevance of what is going on around her; therefore she is amused even at displays of “violence, violence!” (p. 135). If, on the one hand, Honey is unsophisticated and naive, Martha is a very skillful player, full of malice and seduction, with a quick mind and sharp tongue. In most senses, Martha’s and Honey’s characteristics are so opposed as to suggest the unfolding of a personality into two distinct characters, like complementary doubles.⁵¹ That is even more clearly the case of the remaining pair: George and Nick.

An enormous gulf separates the male characters, as conflicting representatives of two different worlds. If the play as a whole opposes and blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction, these characters take a stand each on

⁵⁰ BIGSBY, C.W.E. *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama*. Vol 2. 4. ed. (New York : Cambridge, 1989). p. 267.

⁵¹ The concept of the “double” as in BAKHTIN, M. *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (Ann Arbor : Ardis, 1973).

one side of the dispute. In order to pursue a more detailed analysis of their characteristics, I would like to quote from a list of dichotomies suggested by Ehrmann⁵² which seems to have been tailor-made for Nick and George:

seriousness	play
usefulness	gratuitousness
fecundity	sterility
work	leisure
science	literature
reality	unreality

Many examples can be found of Nick's seriousness and George's playfulness, especially because they usually occur simultaneously in the same scenes, as counterpoints to each other. They are already revealed in their first exchanges, and the contrast comes out more overtly when they are left alone on the stage. In George's words, Nick has "the most profound indication of a social malignancy ... no sense of humour" (p. 68). Nick does not understand many of George's jokes, and when he does he fails to see the fun in them. Consider his reaction in this example:

- George: (*comforting a child*) Well, you'll get over that. . . small college and all. Musical beds is the faculty sport around here.
- Nick: Sir?
- George: I said, musical beds is the faculty. . . . never mind. (p. 34)

He is unable to recognize George's signalling of the beginning of a game, which is a failure in frame perception, so that he constantly upkeys the events to the level of serious activity. George, in turn, is witty by nature, and his humour ranges from puns and mere playfulness to irony and sarcasm, as when he explains about the time he was the head of the History Department:

⁵² EHRMANN, J. "Homo Ludens Revisited." In: EHRMANN, J. (Ed.). "Game, play, literature." Special Issue. *Yale French Studies*, 41 (1968).

I did run the History Department, for four years, during the war, but that was because everybody was away. Then ... everybody came back ... because nobody got killed. That's New England for you. Isn't that amazing? Not one single man in this whole place got his head shot off. That's pretty irrational. (p. 39)

The types of humorous games employed by George and Martha, mainly, during the length of the play will be the subject of discussion of another chapter in my analysis, and the examples offered here should suffice as far as the contrast in relation to Nick's seriousness is concerned.

Moving down the list, we find that usefulness is a term that applies very aptly to Nick. He is the practical, objective young man, which makes for his reluctance in taking part in jokes and games for which he sees no point. On the other hand, as mentioned above, when he takes Martha to bed, it is not out of desire. For him, "Hump the Hostess" is a serious game to be played as a way to move up the career ladder, after all "that's the way to power—plow 'em all!" (p. 114). George, however, lacks the practicality to move up his department or to gain respect from his wife. He is the intellectual, with a romantic outlook on life, in contrast to Nick, who is more sober and classic.⁵³ By that token, Nick can count on reason, skill, industriousness, reliance, calculation, predictability, objectivity, economy, whereas George takes emotion, creativity, inventiveness and flexibility on his side.

⁵³ Robert Pirsig offers an effective, brief summary of the contrast between the two modes of thought in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*: "The terms 'classic' and 'romantic' [...] mean the following: A classical understanding sees the world primarily as underlying form itself. A romantic understanding sees it primarily in terms of immediate appearance. [...] The romantic mode is primarily inspirational, imaginative, creative, intuitive. Feelings rather than facts predominate. 'Art' when it is opposed to 'Science' is often romantic. It does not proceed by reason or by laws. It proceeds by feeling, intuition and esthetic conscience. [...] The classic mode, by contrast, proceeds by reason and by laws..." PIRSIG, R. M. *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (New York : Bantam, 1989). p.61.

As to fecundity, both couples suffer from some sort of sterility, but we should remember that Honey's inability to conceive is her own doing, whereas George and Martha's sterility is authentic. Thus, Nick would stand as the reproductive element of the group—Honey might be infertile too, given her slimhippedness—and although he fails with Martha (some doubt is left in the air about that, however), his impotence is attributed to excess of alcohol and is therefore only temporary. In other fields, like the production of ideas or stories, however, it is George who is prolific.

Work and leisure also differentiate the two men. At the beginning of the play, when George complains he is tired, Martha replies:

I don't know what you're so tired about . . . you haven't done anything all day, you didn't have any classes, or anything. . . . (p. 7)

He does not seem to enjoy physical activity or work, and, unlike Nick, is not so concerned with his job or career. He is more attracted to leisure activities: he mentions holiday travelling and proposes the riddles and games.

As Nick states when talking to George alone in Act II: "You've got history on your side. . . . I've got biology on mine. History, biology" (p. 112). The two subjects and their differences describe the two professors accurately. Nick is the representative of a forward-looking, practical, result-seeking, experimental science. As a scientist, he is concerned with data, not values. George sees this man and his science as a menace, leading to the alteration of genetic makeup which would produce good results, such as health and longevity, but with dreadful side effects, as he puts it:

Everyone will tend to be rather the same. . . . Alike. [...] A certain amount of regulation will be necessary [...] a certain number of sperm tubes will have to be cut [...] which will assure the sterility of the imperfect [...] with this, we will have, in time, a race of glorious men. [...] I suspect we will not have

much music, much painting, but we will have a [...] race of scientists and mathematicians [...] Cultures and races will eventually vanish ... the ants will take over the world. [...] the surprise, the multiplexity, the seachanging rhythm of ... history, will be eliminated. (p. 65-67)

George has history on his side, and history is closer to art than to science; it looks backwards, is unpredictable. Here he shows his romantic side, and literature is correctly descriptive of him, once he is creative, inventive as narrator and creator of fictions. He has even written a novel, is well-read and able to quote literature, as in the allusion to Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*⁵⁴:

(Appearing in the doorway, the snapdragons covering his face; speaks in a hideously cracked falsetto)

Flores; flores para los muertos. Flores. (p. 195)

Just as George stands for the arts, he also embodies the characteristics of the play world itself, in opposition to the "real" world of Nick. He revels in unreality, by creating games and their rules, by inventing fictions and playing them as truth. If Nick tells the truth about his reasons for having married Honey, George speaks of his past in a fictional way, which is later denounced by Martha. Nick stands for "reality," he plays by rules valid everywhere else, but is at a loss when it comes to the rules of the games as set by his hosts, for they are internal to the games and valid only there. He can only make sense of what has

⁵⁴ "(A Vendor comes around the corner. She is a blind Mexican Woman in a dark shawl, carrying bunches of those gaudy tin flowers that lower-class Mexicans display at funerals and other festive occasions. She is calling barely audibly. Her figure is only faintly visible outside the building) Mexican Woman: Flores. Flores. Flores para los muertos. Flores. Flores." WILLIAMS, Tennessee. *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Scene nine. Attention is called to this parody in the play by Bigsby in: BIGSBY, C. W. E. *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-century American Drama* (New York : Cambridge University Press, 1989). p.270.

happened when the night is nearly over and he comments, “Jesus Christ, I think I understand this” (p. 236).

George finds his double in Nick, a counterpart to his own self, and the same could be said of Martha in relation to Honey, the main difference being that George in many passages truly dialogues with his double, in a fashion which is denied the women. Nevertheless, when the night ends, it is as if they had been visited by their alter egos. When the characteristics of one couple are highlighted, those of the other seem to be emphasized in contrast. Consider how the moment when George is most intellectual Nick is at the height of his physical participation in the story—his seduction by Martha in Act II while George reads. Similarly, while Honey is curled up in foetal position on the bathroom floor, Martha is at her most seductive, independent moment (same scene as above). On the other hand, when the older couple finally come to face their own real condition and their warlike, playful side is subdued, there seems to be less contrast to the younger couple, as if the doubles had faded back into each other in reconciliation.

2.3 In the hall of mirrors

As mentioned above, George stands for the art world, the fictional world, and in that function he becomes a metafictional character, and opens the way to our exploration of this level of the play. Martha and George, as characters in a play, also perform, i. e. act out, before a fictional audience constituted by their guests (intrafictional audience⁵⁵). As the hosts play their games, the guests

⁵⁵ I will use the term “intrafictional” to refer to elements that belong to the story world established in the play, as opposed to “extrafictional.” In that sense, my use of “intrafictional” is equivalent to the term “diegetic” or “intradiegetic” for the levels inside a narrative, although a more

watch and get involved, in a way that resembles the emotional involvement of a real, extrafictional audience⁵⁶ towards a play. So, the actual audience observes the guests as a reflection of themselves on the stage, as a microcosm of the relationship between play and audience. Nick, for instance, complains about the abuse they are subjected to by their hosts:

(with great disdain) I just don't see why you feel you have to subject other people to it [...] if you and your ... wife ... want to go at each other, like a couple of ... [...] ... animals, I don't see why you don't do it when there aren't any ... (p. 91-92).

Which is a reaction very similar to that reported by the critics during the performances of the play.⁵⁷ But in the sequence he admits that he stays on because of his curiosity and admiration of the hosts' performance, just like the real audience will stand about three hours of aggression and "nonsense" if that is done well:

Nick: *(a tight smile)* No, it's that sometimes I can admire things that I don't admire. Now, flagellation isn't my idea of good times, but....
 George: ...but you can admire a good flagellator... a real pro.
 Nick: Unh-hunh... yeah. (p. 91-92)

That comment leads us to Tom Driver, in his article "What's the Matter with Edward Albee?," when he argues against the two most successful plays by Albee by stating that they are

complex model of narrative levels should include and distinguish both levels, as found in BRANIGAN, E. *Narrative Comprehension and Film* (London : Routledge, 1992). The "intrafictional audience" is called the "Dramatic audience" by Keir Elam, as opposed to the actual theatrical audience. ELAM, K. *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London : Methuen, 1980). My choice favours the greater flexibility and breadth of scope of that term.

⁵⁶ Terms like "extrafictional," as used by Branigan to indicate the levels of narration and perception. BRANIGAN, Edward. *Narrative Comprehension and Film* (London : Routledge, 1992).

⁵⁷ BIGSBY, C.W.E. *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama*. Vol 2. (New York : Cambridge University Press, 1989).

built upon an unbelievable situation—namely, *that a sane, average-type person would be a passive spectator in the presence of behaviour obviously headed toward destructive violence*. In *The Zoo Story*, why does Peter just sit there while Jerry works himself up to suicide? Why doesn't Nick, in *Who's Afraid?*, take his young wife and go home when he sees that George and Martha want only to fight the whole night through? In both cases, the answer is either that there is *some psychological explanation that has not been written into the play*, or that if Peter or Nick did the logical thing and went home the play would be over.⁵⁸ (emphasis added)

What Mr Driver is implying above is that the audience of boxing matches is insane. Instead of seeking for a psychological explanation in the play, he should ponder the fact that just as people attend and cheer at boxing, gather at the scene of an accident, watch horror films, never has an audience of a performance of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* been reported to have left before the end of the play, despite its daunting length. He would see that extraordinary behaviour such as presented by Jerry, Martha and George constitute a spectacle, that claims an audience, usually of average type. This means that as George and Martha's guest-entertainment becomes spectacle, Honey and Nick get engrossed as spectators.

George and Martha, on their turn, are wide aware of their roles as performers for an audience: "anybody who comes here ends up getting... testy. *It's expected...*" (p. 99, emphasis added). They play the games and make the rules. Especially George, who holds the power to create and maintain fiction. He also fictionalizes reality, as by writing the story Martha claims to be autobiographical (p.137), and raises fiction to the status of reality, which is the case of the imaginary child he and his wife have brought up. The power to create is also the power to destroy, and he kills the child in the end. It is in this

⁵⁸ DRIVER, Tom F. "What's the Matter with Edward Albee?" From *The Reporter* (January 2, 1964).

capacity that George is “both a character in the play and a detached representation of the playwright as artist and director.”⁵⁹ In Act II, he actually directs the action in the game of “Get the guests” and is also an entertainer to the audience of three as well as a storyteller. As the master of ceremonies, he states: “this is my game! You played yours... you people. This is my game!” (p. 142). And he is responsible for the upkeep of the rules of the game. Yet, when he announces the death of their imaginary son, Martha says:

No! No! You cannot do that! You can't decide that for yourself! I will not let you do that! [...] I will not let you decide these things! (p. 232)

What she fails to notice is that in fact he can. She thinks he is not abiding by the rules, but he is! He has not broken the rules, only they are now playing a different game. When she told Honey about their “son,” *she* broke the rules, but kept on playing. According to Roy Harris, if a game allows a rule to be broken without sanctions, then it is no longer the same game.⁶⁰ In the new version of the game, if Martha is allowed to talk to the guests about “baby,” then George can “kill” him. In fact, when Martha complains that George cannot kill the “kid,” she seems to have forgotten a passage in which she and her husband once more performed their metafictional role by discussing the rules of the games they were playing⁶¹:

Martha: I'm going to make the damned biggest explosion you ever heard.
 George: (*Very pointedly*) You try it and I'll beat you at your own game.
 Martha: (*Hopefully*) Is that a threat, George? Hunh?
 George: That's a threat, Martha.

⁵⁹ SCHLÜTER, J. *Metafictional Characters in Modern Drama* (New York : Columbia University Press, 1979).

⁶⁰ HARRIS, Roy. *Language, Saussure and Wittgenstein : How to Play Games with Words* (London : Routledge, 1991).

⁶¹ Besides that, this constitutes another instance of the signalling of the game, as discussed before.

Martha: (*Fake-spits at him*) You're going to get it, baby.
 George: Be careful, Martha... I'll rip you to pieces.
 Martha: You aren't man enough... you haven't got the guts.
 George: Total war?
 Martha: Total. (*Silence. They both seem relieved... elated.*)
 (p.158, emphasis added)

This frame-break not only gives George the permission to act as he does at the end, but also suggests the stepping-out from the intrafictional⁶² "stage," as if they were making arrangements for the performance to be offered to the intrafictional "audience," i. e. their guests. In that sense, it is relevant that they should make the exchange above away from their guests, and only after that Nick should reenter the stage.⁶³

George also plays his metafictional role when he calls attention to the real or fictional status of what is being said or done. Let us consider the scene in which he and Nick are alone, in Act I. At one moment, George looks up at the ceiling and asks, "What are they doing up there? I assume that's where they are" (p. 39). That comment seems at first to refer to the women, but the audience is reminded of characters, and the respective actors, who are not present on the stage, and what the latter do then, while their characters have left for an imaginary space beyond what is seen. More technically, there is a reversal of the frames of perception, for attention is drawn from the directional track (main action) to the disattended track (i. e., events located out of frame).⁶⁴ Such technique also allows for the effect of foreshadowing of problems to arise

⁶² An alternative term would be "intradramatic," or an even simpler "dramatic," by analogy with "diegetic," employed for narrative.

⁶³ In the film version, that discussion is done outside, far from the guests, and marks the moment at which Martha and George separate; he walks home and she drives Nick and Honey to their house.

⁶⁴ The various tracks (directional, concealment, etc.) are the subject of the chapter 7, "Out-of-Frame Activity," in GOFFMAN, E. *Frame Analysis: an Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1974). p. 201-246.

at the return of the female characters, and this creates an amount of suspense and anxiety for the audience.

Similarly, George himself calls into question the truth of what is being said—and so does Martha, at several moments—as in:

George: Martha's lying, I want you to know that, right now. Martha's lying. (*Martha laughs*) There are very few things in this world that I am sure of... [...] but the one thing in this whole sinking world that I am sure of is my partnership, my chromosomological partnership in the... creation of our... blond-eyed, blue-haired... son. (p. 72)

Although George affirms that Martha is lying, his own speech becomes suddenly suspicious, once he says he is not sure of much, and that which he is sure of he might reverse as in “blond-eyed, blue-haired” (p. 72). That becomes more evident as Martha comments: “Our son does not have blue hair... or blue eyes, for that matter. He has green eyes... like me” (p. 72).

As the argument develops, even Nick interferes to question her version of the facts: “Your eyes are... brown, aren't they?” To which she replies with: “Green! (*A little too fast*) Well, in some lights they look brown, but they're green. [...] I was giving you the benefit of the doubt” (p. 72-73).

Such exchanges constitute a three-level attack on credibility: data is doubted or contradicted by one character, then questioned by another, and finally questioned by a third character. At this point, a member from the intrafiction audience is questioning whether the characters are telling the truth. A fourth level might then be added if we consider that the extrafictional audience will doubt it in turn. Another instance is provided when George tells Nick of Martha's stepmother. Nick wonders: “Your wife never mentioned a stepmother,” and George replies, after some consideration: “Well... maybe it isn't true” (p. 110).

If such stories are brought into suspicion, or shown to be lies so openly sometimes, it also happens that lies are presented at the moment of becoming truth right before the characters:

- Nick: I'll play the charades like you've got 'em set up. ... I'll play in your language. ... *I'll be what you say I am.*
- George: You are already... you just don't know it.
- Nick: (*Shaking within*) No... no. Not really. But I'll be it, mister. ... *I'll show you something come to life you'll wish you hadn't set up.*
(p. 150, emphasis added)

Fiction also becomes true to Martha as she cries over the death of her imaginary son. Even though it is a fantasy, it has been rehearsed as truth for twenty-one years, and as such is raised to an intermediate stage between “reality” and fiction.⁶⁵ Together with the creation of other fictions and the questioning of each other’s versions by Martha and George—and sometimes of their respective versions—this fictional level created and maintained by the main characters makes of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* an exercise in fiction that is fully aware of itself as such and of the blurred boundaries between fact and fiction. Such evidence holds the naturalistic interpretation of the play in check; instead of the fourth wall of the naturalistic drama Albee offers the audience four walls built with mirrors, the fourth being placed, in a sense, behind the spectators. Those who subscribe to the “realism” of the play fail to perceive that the characters, mainly the “performers,” defy that realism by playing the narcissistic game of their own fictionality; the cards are being dealt by themselves, as they revel the game of inventing their own games.

⁶⁵ The relation between “fiction” and “truth” will be discussed again later, in Chapter V.

2.4 Playing the games

George, Martha, Honey and Nick do play overt games that could have their place in the naturalistic level, the restriction in this case being that of the excessive and obsessive characteristics of their playing. During the play, what should have been an ordinary social gathering turns into a sort of group therapy, and this is the direction we take now to analyse the psychological games played by the characters, of which the explicit games played—"Humiliate the Host," "Get the Guests," "Hump the Hostess" and "Bringing Up Baby," and minor ones like "Snap the Dragons," "Peel the Labels," "Houseboy"—are examples. To that effect, I employ the concepts and vocabulary common in the field of transactional analysis as found in the works by Eric Berne⁶⁶ and Thomas A. Harris.⁶⁷

Harris follows Berne in saying that there are six ways of structuring time, namely withdrawal, rituals, activities, passtimes, games and intimacy. For the purposes of our study, three of these forms will be more relevant; the games foremost, but also rituals and passtimes. A brief introduction to the distinction between these concepts may be devised as follows.

Rituals include greetings, religious procedures and funerals, for the sake of examples. The definition offered by Thomas Harris reads: "A ritual is a socially programmed use of time where everybody agrees to do the same thing. It is safe, there is no commitment to or involvement with another person, the outcome is predictable."⁶⁸

⁶⁶ BERNE, Eric. *Games People Play* : the Psychology of Human Relationships (New York : Ballantine Books, 1964).

⁶⁷ HARRIS, Thomas A. *I'm OK—You're OK*. 1. Paperback Printing (New York : Avon Books, 1973).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

Passtime, in transactional analysis, refers to agreeable means that two or more people can use to pass the time, talking. Games differ from both by featuring two particular characteristics: their secretive nature (a secret, underlying meaning beneath the apparent surface) and the outcome (what is sought for, and which contains a payoff). I will discuss the constitution of the games in more detail later; for the time being, the distinction provided by the secret side of the games will suffice for some considerations.

First of all, it should be noticed that a ritual to be expected in the interaction between hosts and visitors would be that of initial greetings and introductions. But in the play, such expectations are ironically reversed, and when the door is open, the guests are welcomed thus:

- Martha: SCREW YOU! (*simultaneously with Martha's last remark, George flings open the front door. Honey and Nick are framed in the entrance. There is a brief silence, then. ...*)
- George: (*Ostensibly a pleased recognition of Honey and Nick, but really satisfaction at having Martha's explosion overheard*)
Ahhhhhhhh!
- Martha: (*A little too loud ... to cover*) HI! Hi, there ... c'mon in! (p.19)

Nick and Honey try to follow the usual ritual, but are embarrassed and baffled⁶⁹ by the hosts' downkeying of a routine guided doing⁷⁰ into play:

- Honey and Nick (*ad lib*): Hello, here we are ... hi ...
- George: (*very matter-of-factly*) You must be our little guests.
- Martha: Ha, ha, ha, HA! Just ignore old sour-puss over there. C'mon in, kids ... give your coats and stuff to sour-puss.
- Nick: (*without expression*) Well, now, perhaps we shouldn't have come. ...
- Honey: Yes ... it is late, and ...

⁶⁹ "...[A ritual] can be pleasant insofar as you are 'in step' or doing the right thing." HARRIS, T. A. *I'm OK—You're OK*. (New York : Avon Books, 1973). p.143.

⁷⁰ George's behaviour in this scene illustrates what Goffman refers to as the transformation of routine guided doings into play—an extra framing of a situation (downkeying). GOFFMAN. *Frame Analysis : an Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1974).

Martha: Late! Are you kidding? Throw your stuff down anywhere and c'mon in. (p. 20)

Even the first exchange as shown above prove a clue to how the relationship between the characters is going to develop in the course of the night. The farewell between the couples also contradicts the procedures of the ritual, and the younger couple is dismissed by George with the following words:

George: Home to bed, children; it's way past your bedtime.
 Nick: (*His hand out to Honey*) Honey?
 Honey: (*Rising, moving to him*) Yes.
 George: You two go now.
 Nick: Yes.
 Honey: Yes.
 Nick: I'd like to....
 George: Good night.
 Nick: (*pause*) good night.
 (*Nick and Honey exit; George closes the door after them...*) (p.238)

From the ritual of greetings, the next step would naturally be that of small talk of the kind produced when people are first introduced; inconsequential, semi-ritualistic talk. We observe that upon entering the house and taking seats, Nick and Honey try to break the ice with this sort of passtime—or trying to lead to passtime:

Honey: (*As she sits*) Oh, isn't this lovely!
 Nick: (*Perfunctorily*) Yes indeed... very handsome.
 Martha: Well, thanks.
 Nick: (*Indicating the abstract painting*) Who... who did the...?
 Martha: That? Oh, that's by....
 George: ...some Greek with a moustache Martha attacked one night in....
 (p. 21)

So we observe the conversation as it starts taking the expected continuation but then it is aborted by George's remark, which twists the matter grotesquely with no apparent reason. This move is symptomatic of the

relationships during the play, turning casual conversation into a battle, and at the same time signalling the invitation or challenge to play, and so marking the beginning of a game, which Nick fails to recognize.⁷¹ In other words, passtime is converted into game, and from then on most of the night will be spent in the playing of games.

By definition, the games in Transactional Analysis are dishonest because they are composed of a series of moves that lead up to a trick, or trap, and are therefore suitable for dramatic effect. Let us consider first the division made of the ego into three states which will model our behaviour: the Father, The Adult, and the Child. The Father corresponds to the record we have kept subconsciously of the behaviour of our parents. The Child is the free, subversive, playful side of our nature, and the Adult is the rational side of the personality that analyses information, makes decisions, etc. A balanced, rational conversation yields from a dialogue involving the Adult state of those talking, but let us observe the pattern of a conversation between George and Martha at the beginning of the play:

- George: I'm tired, dear... it's late... and besides....
 Martha: I don't know what you're so tired about... you haven't done anything all day; you didn't have any classes, or anything....
 George: Well, I'm tired.... If your father didn't set up these goddamn Saturday night orgies all the time....
 Martha: Well, that's too bad about you, George.... (p. 7)

In the first speech, George emits a judgement of his condition that we can accept as neutral and rational, a message of his Adult directed at the Adult of

⁷¹ It is interesting to notice that at the beginning of the play, when Martha challenges George with a riddle ("What a dump. Hey, what's that from?"), *he* is the one who refuses to take part in the game. The signalling of the game is the subject of discussion in the chapter "Keys and Keyings", in GOFFMAN, E. *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974).

Martha, calling for an exchange between Adults. But she replies in a way that shows it is not the Adult who is speaking, but a critical Father who directs his criticism towards the Child of the other. George then, in his turn, answers like a rebellious Child, which develops the argument even further.

The couple hardly ever produce a conversation of the type Adult-Adult—we might say with Harris that the conversation is usually “contaminated.” Examples of Child-Father exchanges, however, are plentiful and easy to locate, and sometimes even the language used favours that identification. Consider Martha’s use of expletives, for instance, which would be out of place in the Adult. Besides that, there are moments when their speeches present distortions or mispronunciations of words to imitate child-talk:

Martha: Oh. Well, then, you just trot over to the barie-poo....

George: (*Taking the tone from her*) ...and make your little mommy a *gweat big dwink*. (p. 48, emphasis added)

More important than that, however, is the fact that the prominence of a certain state is usually a clue to a “position” assumed by the person, as a role or script that he/she will follow in their relationships throughout life. Martha looks up to her father, and consequently takes over the role of a Critical Father as a position in life, whereas George’s position is that of a Child who is always in the wrong and being criticised for having failed. These two positions are what allows for the marriage between them, for their behaviour towards each other provides the confirmation of their positions. It is as if there were a contract signed by them to the effect that he will keep on falling short of her standards of achievement, activity, etc., and she will permanently criticise him for that. But I will withhold the examples of that “contract” until I have discussed the characteristics and moves that constitute the games played.

The games characterize a two-level transaction. At the social level, a simple conversation or passtime seems to be going on. At the psychological level, however, the conversation is developing through a structure of moves that obey certain rules towards a specific goal, usually support to the "position" adopted by the players. This support is like a confirmation of one's script in the relationship and in life. The moves taken can be described both at the social (the direct sequence of events) and psychological (the hidden meaning underlying the sentences) levels, and this description is referred to as the thesis of the game. The blocking of the normal sequence of the game, for example, the refusal of one of the players to provide the necessary response to the other, is called an antithesis.

In the first scene of the play, as soon as the couple enter the house, Martha looks about the room and says: "What a dump. Hey, what's that from? 'What a dump!'" (p. 3), which on the surface seems to be an instance of curiosity, a trivial question. But in the sequence of the conversation we notice that Martha stops being interested in the information itself; when George says he does not know the answer, she seems to change her attitude. When we get to the point where Martha tells him off with sentences like: "Don't you know anything?" (p. 5), we have a confirmation that she is actually playing a game. At the psychological level, it is this sentence she has been seeking to reach (the "pay-off"). What she really wants is to criticise George and prove him a failure and at the same time reinforce her position as a wife who has to do everything for herself because she is tied to a husband who is a "flop." This is confirmed again in the continuation of the scene: "You didn't do anything; you never do anything; you never mix. You just sit around and talk" (p. 7).

Here we find the critical Father telling the clumsy Child to do something He (she, in this instance) knows he does not want to do, or is unable to, and who then waits for the failure to occur to criticise the Child openly. It is typical of such a game that the criticism is overgeneralized and full of absolutes like “always,” “everything,” “nothing” and “never.” This game, as described above in its thesis, is fueled by anger, and is called “Now I’ve got you, you SOB.”⁷² Instead of producing an antithesis, George plays his part in the game, by accepting his wife’s anger. That is because the game in reality supports his view of himself as unable to do things right. But this leads us into the subject of another game. First it is important to see that the game of “Now I’ve caught you, you SOB” is perhaps the most frequent in the play. Martha and George keep on playing it time after time, but it is also played on others. Martha performs the same role on playing it on Nick, after having seduced him. Once he has failed her, she uses this against him, this time more a piece of mockery of the game than of real anger. Consider how she humiliates him by making him her houseboy and commanding him to open the door for George—a reversal of roles; earlier George was her houseboy:

Martha: Go answer the door.

Nick: (*amazed*) What did you say?

Martha: I said, go answer the door. What are you, deaf?

Nick: (*trying to get it straight*) You... want me... to go answer the door?

Martha: That’s right, *lunk-head*; answer the door. There must be *something* you can do well; or, are you too drunk to do that, too? Can’t you get the latch up, either?

Nick: Look, there’s no need....

Martha: (*shouting*) Answer it! (*softer*) *You can be houseboy around here for a while. You can start off being houseboy right now.*

Nick: Look, lady, I’m no flunky to you.

⁷² The names of the games are quoted from BERNE, E. *Games People Play : the Psychology of Human Relationships* (New York : Ballantine Books, 1964).

Martha: (*cheerfully*) Sure you are! You're ambitious, aren't you, boy? You didn't chase me around the kitchen and up the goddamn stairs out of mad, driven passion, did you now? You were thinking a little bit about your career, weren't you? Well, you can just houseboy your way up the ladder for a while.
(p. 194, *emphasis added*)

So Nick is also caught in the game. Now that Martha has something against him, we notice that she even starts using for him the same vocabulary she employs for her husband, as in the italics above. Nick understands he has changed his status, and recognizes Martha's position—that could be described in transactional analysis as the position “I'm OK, you are not OK”: “Everybody's a flop to you! Your husband's a flop, I'm a flop....” (p. 189). And George had warned him against that; that is why George is so glad to see Nick in his new role, for it confirms his own expectations: “... There's quicksand here, and you'll be dragged down, just as.... [...] ... before you know it... sucked down....” (p. 115) or in:

(*To Nick... a confidence, but not whispered*) Let me tell you a secret, baby. There are easier things in the world, if you happen to be teaching at a university, there are easier things than being married to the daughter of the president of that university. There are easier things in this world. (p. 26)

George also plays that game. Many of the people who have been “caught” try to “get” someone else, as a way of “passing the buck,” or in other words, in domino fashion. During his conversation with Nick in Act II, we observe George leading what seems on the surface a nice chat, but we can notice he is attentive to any details he might extract from Nick and use against him later, and at one moment he even tells Nick so:

You realize, of course, that I've been drawing you out on this stuff, not because I'm interested in your terrible lifehood, but only because you represent a direct and pertinent threat to my lifehood, and I want to get the goods on you. (p. 111)

Later on, after the game has been played on him (“Humiliate the Host”, he calls it), this preparation leads into the game of “Get the Guests” in which he uses such personal information and secrets to humiliate Nick. So we see these are unfoldings of the same game, “Now I’ve got you, you SOB.”

Whereas the game exemplified above is based on anger and aggression, the game of “Kick me” is based on rejection. It could be said to be complementary to the first one, for the player in “Kick me” needs a partner with a Critical Father. The first player then acts in a clumsy, irritating way so as to provoke an aggressive reaction from the Father, as if he had been pleading “Kick me.” I called attention earlier to the way in which George accepted Martha’s anger and agreed to play his part in her game. He might then be seeking the necessary negative stimulus to confirm his position (“script”) as the underdog who always fails and then asks “Why do such things happen to me?” We should keep in mind the secretive nature of the games; the player is mostly unaware of the game, or of his own moves in it.

Let us consider the following situation as an example. The main conflict in the play arises from Martha’s revelation to strangers of their “son.” George advises her at the beginning not to “start on the bit” about the child, but he knows that irritates her and so increases the possibility of her doing exactly that. On pressing the subject so hard, he seems to be forcing her to act so as to precipitate the conflict. The same can be said of the way he talks to Nick at the opening of Act II. He knows of Martha’s intentions towards Nick, and of his rapport, but instead of dissuading him from trying, he seems to encourage him to play “Hump the Hostess”:

Now that’s it! You can take over all the courses you want to, and get as much of the young elite together in the gymnasium as you like, but until you start plowing pertinent wives, you really aren’t working. The way to a man’s

heart is through his wife's belly, and don't you forget it. [...] That's the way to power—plow them all! (p. 114)

The following exchange shows very clearly the move he is making in the game, and Nick can hardly believe it when he recognizes it:

Nick: And I'll bet your wife's the biggest goose in the gangle, isn't she...? Her father president, and all.
 George: You bet your historical inevitability she is!
 Nick: Yessirree. (*rubs his hands together*) Well now, I'd just better get her off in a corner and mount her like a goddamn dog, eh?
 George: Why, you'd certainly better.
 Nick: (*Looks at George a minute, his expression a little sick*) You know, I almost think you're serious. (p. 114)

Therefore, George's indifference to Martha's seduction of Nick in Act II comes to fit a pattern of "Kick me."⁷³ But not only that, for this complex scene represents the intersection of three distinct games. "Kick me" is only the first of them; we will now focus on the other two.

When Nick affirms: "I'll play the charades like you've got 'em set up... I'll play in your language.... I'll be what you say I am" (p. 150), he is actually stating that he has accepted the game, that he will play his moves towards "Now I've got you, you SOB." When he tries to lay the "Queen of Spades" he also has the objective to attack George, to "kick him."

Martha, in the same scene, is trying to play a different game from the other two protagonists. Her moves indicate she is playing her part in "Let's you and him fight." Its thesis is that a woman manouvers so as to make two men fight for her, with the underlying promise that she will then submit to the winner. It often occurs, by the way, that while the men are fighting either physically of

⁷³ The pattern of "Kick me" is even clearer in the exchange where Martha states: "YOU CAN STAND IT!! YOU MARRIED ME FOR IT!! ... DON'T YOU KNOW IT, EVEN YET? ... My arm has gotten tired whipping you ... For twenty-three years!" (p. 152-3).

verbally, the woman leaves both and looks for a third companion. If Martha's goal had been solely to seduce Nick, she would have had a better time of it by playing it secretly, and avoiding her husband's "revenge." What Martha is trying to do is to provoke her husband's reaction, to spur a fight that will give her the psychological reward of feeling worth fighting for. See how she teases George with more energy than she employs in seducing Nick:

Martha: We're going to amuse ourselves, George.

George: (*not looking up*) Unh-hunh. That's nice.

Martha: You might not like it.

...

(*Nick takes Martha's hand, pulls her to him. They stop for a moment, then kiss, not briefly*)

Martha: (*after*) You know what I'm doing, George?

George: No, Martha... what are you doing?

Martha: I'm entertaining. I'm entertaining one of the guests. I'm necking with one of the guests. (p. 170)

But George does not produce the desired response. He does not show any interest in fighting for her, he seems not to care. This is the antithesis to her game, and it infuriates her more than anything, and she makes a last try:

Martha: (*her anger has her close to tears, her frustration to fury*) Well, I do mind. Now, you pay attention to me! You come off this kick you're on, or I swear to God I'll do it. I swear to God I'll follow that guy into the kitchen, and then I'll take him upstairs, and....

George: (*swinging around to her again... loud... loathing*) SO WHAT, MARTHA?

Martha: (*considers him for a moment... then, nodding her head, backing off slowly*) O.K.... O.K.... You asked for it... and you're going to get it. (p. 173, emphasis added)

The last sentence, which I have emphasized, marks a turning point in the game and in the play. It shows precisely the moment in which Martha has given up playing her own game, as mentioned above. In other words, she did not seem to have the intention, initially, to go through to the end, but now she has

decided to play Nick's game: "Now I've got you, you SOB." And as she affirms that George "asked for it," she indicates that is also part of his game, "Kick me," and that he will get the reward he has been seeking for, the negative stimulus.

So, the game of "Hump the Hostess" is in fact the convergence of different strategies from distinct games, but it is not the last. Before this point in the plot, George had warned Martha: "You try and I'll beat you at your own game. [...] That's a threat, Martha" (p. 158). And what is her game? It is the identification, exposure and nibbling away at the soft spots in the other's character, until she can be sure to have "got" him/her; its thesis is the usual one for "Now I've got you, you SOB," and that is what is in his mind now.

George has an insight at the hardest blow he can produce for Martha, her weak spot. And he aims at it and shoots with his "fake gun" to hit home, by playing "Bringing up baby." Now he plays winners. She is hurt at having to narrate the story of her "son," but then he plays trumps as he breaks the news of the child's death. Ant that is a victory, but a Pyrrhic one, for not only does it come to an end as a game in itself ("Now I've got you..."), but it also determines the end of all games. A stalemate has been reached, and that is why the night is over for hosts and guests, no game, no passtime, no ritual is possible any longer, and the play has to end with it. That is the end of the fantasy, of the match, of fiction, and "reality" has won.

2.5 Endgame

By analyzing the examples extracted from the play, we were able to observe how the characters in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* are paired in

different arrangements by the author and how this “shuffling” enhances their characteristics either by comparison of similarities or of contrasts. It becomes clear then that characters like George and Nick stand as doubles to each other. They are antagonists, and that can be seen from their mutual opposition and from the fact that the rise of one corresponds to the fall of the other, so that at a given moment (the scene of the “houseboy,” in which Nick takes over a function or position that had been George’s at the beginning of the play) they even seem to exchange roles. But the comparison also points to their complementary characteristics, and they may therefore also represent the conflicting polarities of a single soul, showing that what we understand as personality is also the result of an internal game.

Besides that, the characters play a narcissistic role, by means of their behaviour as performers and audience, on the one hand, and through their creation of fictions of their own, on the other. Just as the characters play at exchanging fiction for truth and vice versa to each other, the actual audience of the play is caught in a game of “Get the Guests” led by the author in which the very distinction between life and fiction is blurred, like when trying to get through a hall of mirrors in the fun-house.

At another level, we have followed the development of several psychological games played by the three characters forming the love triangle of the story. Games like “Kick me,” “Let’s you and him fight” and “Now I’ve got you, you SOB” usefully describe and explain the actions and reactions of George, Nick and Martha as moves of open and hidden games. It is their cruel fight for power, revenge, and the maintenance of their own positions in the roles they have decided to play in life that give the plot its momentum and “bite.” Some moves are successful, some are frustrated, some are made more complex

as the characters engage in each other's games, either willingly or reluctantly. And we have even discovered in the course of our investigation that sometimes they are mistaken in thinking they are playing the same game, for various games are operating at the same time, each character playing his own version, so that moves intersect and miss the target. A dead end is reached, however, when George imposes on the others (and himself) the ultimate game, which un.masks all lies and fiction and the characters, stripped bare, cannot hide or play anymore.

The relevance of these analyses is that they bring to light significant levels of meaning hidden beneath the surface of apparent realism of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* As commented earlier, it is revealed that the guests do not stand as opponents to George and Martha, but have the role of intrafictional audience coupled with that of instruments, witnesses and victims of the games played by their hosts. They are not fully aware of their own shifting functions, once these are controlled by the older couple. The hosts' awareness, in contrast, is manifested in many ways that detract from the norm of naturalistic acting. Their position in relation to their audience, the open discussion of rules and their metafictional stance, for instance, although less obtrusive than an expressionistic setting or surreal lighting effects, also break the illusion of naturalistic portrayal. So, the claim for a Strindbergian classification of the play is visibly weakened, if not defeated. The realistic conventions are being downkeyed into a sort of game, in the same way Nick and Honey's social conventions, such as rituals and pastimes, are downkeyed by George and Martha.

Similarly, the contrasting and comparison of the characters through their pairings, as well as the study of their psychological games, allow us to review

the question of misogyny in the play. Lumley calls our attention to Albee's obsession with the all-American shrew. He also sees George as the victim who has "become resigned to Martha's verbal assaults [...] and to much else besides."⁷⁴ But the patterning of the games demonstrates that Martha's behaviour towards her husband is part of a contract, a role to be played for the benefit of both, for both reach a confirmation of their psychological position. Besides, Martha can also be seen as a victim, a frustrated wife that is neglected by her husband—and to that effect her allusion to Bette Davis's Rose in *Beyond the Forest*⁷⁵ appears especially relevant. Another evidence of those traits is the way in which her attempts to get closer to George are turned down by him. So her aggressive behaviour would also seem explained, if not justified, by George's provocation; consider the scene in which she tries to talk him out of his reading. Her infidelity is not a straightforward one, it is rather an attempt to shake George into a more active involvement by a wife who has been taken for granted. That this is so, and that Martha perceives her own guilt in the process, are both revealed in her "monologue" at the opening of Act III. That monologue casts light on the deepest aspects of her personality: she suffers for being caught in a frustrating reality, she is intelligent, capable of self-criticism and affection. This is what the author means when he says Martha is deserving of sympathy. Or, on the other hand, we might say that her husband is as deserving of criticism as she is. To call her a shrew is to deny George's faults and true participation in their relationship and, more important, to neglect all the qualities and motivations that lie beneath Martha's aggressive behaviour; it is,

⁷⁴ LUMLEY, Frederick. *New Trends in 20th Century Drama: a Survey Since Ibsen and Shaw* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1972). p. 327.

⁷⁵ For an analysis of this and other allusions, see next chapter.

in short, to refuse a card that had been dealt, without turning it to see its true face and value.

Those who approach the play with a naturalistic frame of interpretation, certainly find elements which parallel Strindberg's *The Bond*, but tend to overlook the aspects that contradict that comparison, extrapolating the model to include the Scandinavian author's misogyny. Thus, I believe they are only too ready to reduce the relationship between the characters in the play to a war of the sexes, in which Martha's role is simplified to that of the shrew, George's to that of a henpecked husband. The study above has proved that the men and women in the play never form a coalition against each other; so that the confrontation between the hosts does not imply a similar confrontation between the guests. Also, the negative aspects (blame, aggressiveness, etc.) cannot be attributed to either female or male characters, and Martha and Honey do not stand as villains. Consequently, the prejudice against Martha is not Albee's, but is rather imposed on his text from the outside, by the critic who finds her uncomfortably skilled at fighting and despicable for her attempt at unfaithfulness. At least in this case, it was the critic who was caught in an act of misogyny, and Mr Albee is entitled to proceed with his game.

Chapter III

THE WEAVING OF THE ENIGMA

To actually *name* an object is to suppress three-quarters of the sense of enjoyment of a poem, which consists of the delight of guessing, one stage at a time; to *suggest* the object, that is the poet's dream.... There must always be a sense of the enigmatic in poetry, and that is the aim of literature.

Stéphane Mallarmé

3.1 Opponents and teammates

Just as some critics have allowed their view of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* to become distorted by failing to see the relevance of the games played by the characters, they have missed the textual richness of the play. This is probably due to the supposition that it is based on Strindberg's *The Bond*, which precludes the perception of other allusions and influences. The textual investigation of the play should then highlight these elements and either oppose or qualify opinions such as Gottfried's: "the plot is amorphous."⁷⁶

Whether a literary work contains explicit games or not, the relationship it establishes between its author and the reader/audience may be seen as a sort of game in itself. That relationship is seen by Elizabeth Bruss⁷⁷ as a position ranging between two extreme opposites, namely competition and cooperation. In the vast majority of instances, there will be elements of both competitive and

⁷⁶ GOTTFRIED, Martin. *A Theater Divided : the Postwar American Stage*. (Boston : Little, Brown & Company, 1967). p. 266.

⁷⁷ BRUSS, Elizabeth. "The Game of Literature and Some Literary Games." In: *New Literary History*, 9 (1) : 153-72, Autumn 1977.

collaborative nature, characterizing a mixed motive interaction, in which the author both offers and withholds meaning, provides hints and scatters false clues. Skill must be shown in the maintenance of the correct balance, so that the reader/audience is challenged but not frustrated.

Having shown such richness in terms of ludic elements in almost every other aspect, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* should also be expected to offer plenty in terms of the author-audience game. And so it does, although it is not immediately apparent which end of the cooperation-competition axis the play tends to. This will be investigated during the discussion that follows; some observations, however, might be necessary. Although the texts serving as model or basis for my analysis⁷⁸ all concern mainly the study of prose fiction, their methods and terminology can apply equally well to the study of drama and the theatre, by viewing the "text" as a constellation of signs, not restricted to the printed page. Finally, I believe that the analysis made and the conclusions drawn will be pertinent to all of the three modes involved: the dramatic text, the theatrical text, and the filmic text, and reveal a complex structuration hidden behind apparent simplicity.

3.2 The voices in the text

On analysing the text of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, I adopt—and adapt, somehow, using the play as a procrustean bed—Roland Barthes's method of approaching the text as a "textile" woven with five voices, or codes, namely the symbolic, the proaieretic (or the code of action), the semic, the hermeneutic and the referential. Although all five codes contribute to the weaving of the text,

⁷⁸ Barthes's *S/Z*, Eco's *The role of the reader*, and Brooke-Rose's "The readerhood of man." (See bibliographical references).

they do so in different ways, and the balance of the text is sometimes tipped towards certain codes and sometimes favours others. This overdetermination that some codes undergo is a very strong element in many types of narrative text. Some texts highlight the symbolic code. Detective thrillers, for instance, show an overencoding of the proaieretic and hermeneutic codes.

This is where we start our investigation of the voices in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Although it is not a detective story—nor even a narrative, for that matter—the play shows high emphasis on the enigma of the “son” that should not have been mentioned by Martha. The plot revolves around this mystery and has its climax with the solution at the end of the play. As a consequence, the survey of the elements of the hermeneutic code offers prospects of reward.

I propose to consider first some elements that demand special attention because of their complex role in the play. Even though all of the codes constitute departures from the text, by referring to other texts such as the literary tradition, popular culture and the sciences, some do so in a more direct, explicit way. I have in mind the many allusions that pervade the play and belong both to the referential and to the hermeneutic code, performing in the latter the same role as some other elements of the enigma, as we shall see further on. So, before studying the patterns formed by such elements, we will turn to some of its most sophisticated threads.

3.3 Echoes of other voices

Both in the mixed motive interaction between author-audience and in the development of the enigmas, allusions acquire a special status, for they epitomize the charging of elements in the text/play at the same time with

competitive and cooperative power. Once the allusion is recognized as such by the audience, and its source text is identified, it becomes a stepping stone towards subtle shades of meaning, and offers an insight into another level of the play or even constitutes a “key” to the understanding of the whole work. That is its cooperative function, which might be reversed to competition, for whenever the audience fails in that recognition or identification the allusion is transformed into a snag. If the author has provided for the overlap of other cooperative elements which might make up for the opportunity missed, the audience will be safe; otherwise, the viewer/reader will feel cheated, outwitted or even completely at a loss before an insurmountable obstacle.

Most of the power of the allusions ingrained in the text stems from the magnitude of their range of reference, so that a single word is able to bring into the text a whole fictional world that was initially alien to it. Ben-Porat managed to summarize this capacity in a short, effective definition: “The literary allusion is a device for the simultaneous activation of two texts.”⁷⁹ Still according to Ben-Porat, there are four stages involved in the process of allusion:

1. Recognition of a Marker in a given sign;
2. Identification of the Evoked Text;
3. Modification of the Initial Local Interpretation of the Signal;
4. Activation of the Evoked Text as a whole, in an attempt to form maximum intertextual patterns

Being equipped with such conceptual framework, we can pursue an analysis of the most relevant allusions found in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, by which I mean those relevant to a discussion of the hermeneutic code

⁷⁹ BEN-PORAT, Ziva. “The poetics of literary allusion.” *PTL : a Journal for Descriptive Poetics and Theory of Literature*, 1 (1) : 105-28, 1976.

in operation in the play. I proceed to identify the elements and their relationship in each of these allusions. And even though the first allusion is found in the very title, its complexity is such that we can only benefit from postponing it until we have analysed other instances. The following chart refers to Martha's allusion to a given speech in a Hollywood film:

“What a dump” allusion:

Alluding text:	Albee's play
Sign with the marker:	“What a dump”
Marking aspect of the sign:	Identical quotation
Sign with marked elements:	“What a dump”
Evoked text:	Film <i>Beyond the Forest</i>
Referent:	Martha's house
Referent ₁ :	Rose's house
Local interpretation:	Realization of Martha's dissatisfaction with her life with George
Local interpretation ₁ :	Realization of Rose's dissatisfaction with her life with her husband (Joseph Cotten)
Local interpretation ₂ :	Pattern of housewives frustrated by sterile marriage to a weaker man
Optional activations:	Abortion (and sterility) are common traits of the couples, and so is unfaithfulness, and murder

In this instance, the first stage, i. e. the recognition of the marker, is performed by the character (Martha) herself, as she points it out as an allusion: “What a dump. Hey, what's that from? ‘What a dump!’” (p. 3). She makes it into a riddle to her husband, the solution to which would then fulfil the second stage, that of identification of the evoked text. But that expectation is frustrated

by both hers and her husband's failure in remembering the title of the film, although Martha can locate many of its characteristics:

It's from some goddam Bette Davis picture... some goddamn Warner Brothers epic.... [...] Bette Davis gets peritonitis in the end... she's got this big black fright wig she wears all through the picture and she gets peritonitis, and she's married to Joseph Cotten or something.... [...] and she wants to go to Chicago all the time, 'cause she's in love with that actor with the scar.... But she gets sick, and she sits down in front of her dressing table.... [...] and she tries to put her lipstick on, but she can't... and she gets it all over her face... but she decides to go to Chicago anyway, and.... [...] Bette Davis comes home from a hard day at the grocery store... [...] She's a housewife; she buys things... and she comes home with the groceries, and she walks into the modest living room of the modest cottage modest Joseph Cotten has set her up in.... [...] And she comes in, and she looks around, and she puts her groceries down, and she says, "What a dump!" (pages 4-6)

Now, regardless of the "missing" title, the description above is rich enough to lead the audience into the third stage, where the initial interpretation of the sign as a simple riddle, or "teasing" of George by Martha, can be modified according to a new frame of reference. Martha is seen now to identify with Bette Davis's character in the movie, and the referent of the quotation in the source text (Bette Davis's living room) to a similar referent in the alluding text (Martha's living room in the play; Martha's kitchen in the filmic version; and the whole house in both). A pattern is made clear, then, of a housewife expressing her discontent with the life she leads. As soon as this local interpretation has been reached in relation to Martha's life, the way is paved for further activations between the two texts. Even when relying solely on Martha's description of the plot of the film, the audience may be able to find other grounds for comparison. Given the fact that in both texts the husband and the house are modest, the viewers may draw other parallels, projecting on the future of the play/film they are watching. If the clues are not false, then Martha is a frustrated housewife who dreams of a better life in a big city (Chicago,

perhaps), is in love with another man, has got some sort of disease which undermines her self-control, and nevertheless shows determination enough to carry on.

That is as far as the viewer can go from that description alone, but if the film in question is a familiar one to them, more optional activation will become possible. *Beyond the Forest*⁸⁰ tells the story of Roşe (Bette Davis), the bored wife of Doctor JC (Joseph Cotten), “whose blandness drives her to commit adultery and murder.”⁸¹ The description of the film offered by Charles Higham reads:

Em *Beyond the Forest*, Bette interpretava uma dona-de-casa de cidade pequena que sonha com a cidade grande: Chicago. De encontro ao panorama de fundo das chaminés de fábrica vomitando fumaça... Rosa Moline vive atormentada e reprimida. Cansada do marido sensato e realista, ela se envolve num escaldante caso amoroso com um homem de negócios machista que posteriormente a rejeita quando ela se atira ao seu pescoço. A trama inclui um aborto forçado, seduções, discussões violentas, partidas e chegadas sob chuva torrencial, tudo acompanhado pelo ritmo acelerado da trilha sonora de Max Steiner. Na última cena, Rosa, semimorta, caminha distraidamente na direção de um trem, acabando, numa dramática transferência, no lado errado da linha.⁸²

⁸⁰ *Beyond the Forest*. Warner Bros., 1949. Director: King Vidor. Screenplay by Lenore Coffee based on story by Stuart Engstrand. Cast: Bette Davis, Joseph Cotten, David Brian, Ruth Norman, Minor Watson, Dona Drake, Regis Toomey.

⁸¹ VERMILYE, Jerry. *Bette Davis: a Pyramid Illustrated History of the Movies*. (New York: Pyramid Books, 1973). p. 146.

⁸² “In *Beyond the Forest*, Bette plays a small-town housewife who dreams of the big city: Chicago. Faced with the backdrop of factory chimneys vomiting smoke... Rose Moline is constantly upset and depressed. Tired of her sensible, realist husband, she gets involved in a ‘hot’ love affair with a chauvinistic businessman who later rejects her. The plot includes an intentional abortion, seduction, violent rows, departures and arrivals in the pouring rain, marked by the rapid beat of the soundtrack by Max Steiner. In the last scene, Rose, half dead, walks absent-mindedly towards a train, and ends up, in a dramatic transfer, on the wrong side of the railway” (my translation from the Portuguese version). HIGHAM, Charles. *Bette Davis*. Trad. Luiz Horácio da Matta (Rio de Janeiro: Francisco Alves, 1983). p. 265.

Many of the predictions based on the comparison with the film are confirmed during the development of the play, although a few might have been misplaced. For instance, in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* it is not the protagonist who has had an abortion, but her guest; Martha dreams (or at least has dreamt) of George's taking over the History Department and later the university, and not of living in a big city.

The allusion proves to be a very significant one, once its activation highlights the similar characteristics of the two texts: Martha's disappointment and despair, her lack of self-control, the couple's sterility, the one-night love affair, Martha's final frustration, abortion and "murder." The variations in the handling of such shared elements marks the identity of each text, but do not indicate a parodic treatment of the film by Albee (at most a pseudo-parody).⁸³

"Flores para los muertos" allusion

Alluding text:	Albee's play
Sign with the marker:	"Flores; flores para los muertos. Flores."
Marking aspect of the sign:	Nearly identical quotation
Sign with marked elements:	"Flores. Flores. Flores para los muertos. Flores. Flores."
Evoked text:	T. Williams's play <i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i>
Referent:	George brings flowers
Referent ₁ :	Mexican woman selling flowers
Local interpretation:	Flowers for the dead: George and Martha's son
Local interpretation ₁ :	Flowers for the dead: Blanche's husband

⁸³ This will be the subject of discussion later in Chapter V.

Local interpretation 2:	Mourning for the missing
Optional activations:	Death, the protagonist's breakdown after loss of hope

I have commented earlier, in Chapter II, that George's quotation qualifies him as a man of the arts. Whereas Martha quotes from a second rate film, he borrows his lines from a major work by an outstanding playwright. The literary allusion to Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* is marked by a direct, nearly identical quotation from the source-text, where the referent is a blind Mexican woman selling tin flowers.

Just as the speech in the evoked text signals a foreshadowing of the fate of the protagonist, i.e. Blanche's madness, so does the speech in the alluding text in relation to Martha. There is a role played by sex in the transformation of the characters' condition: Blanche's rape rips the veil she has woven around herself and exposes her true condition; Martha's frustrated attempt with Nick shows her both the futility of her pretence and her devotion to George—although in a sense it is too late, as the final collapse has already been triggered by George's decision to "kill" their son.

This example also demonstrates how allusions can refer back to other allusions in a process that could go on *ad infinitum*, for the reference to the "flowers for the dead" is reminiscent of the celebration of the "Day of the Dead" in Mexico.⁸⁴ So, the alluded sign in *A Streetcar Named Desire* is in turn a sign with a marker alluding to a third text, and this to a fourth, and so on.

⁸⁴ A brilliant study of the Day of the Dead and its significance for the Mexican people is provided by Octavio Paz in a specific chapter of *The Labyrinth of Solitude : and Other Writings*. Trans. Lysander Kemp, Yara Milos, and Rachel Phillips Belash. (New York : Grove Weidenfeld, 1991). p. 47-64.

“Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?” allusion

The title of the play bears the first, most complex, and most important, allusions. Behind what seems to be a mere play on words there is the complex activation of multiple elements from three different source “texts,” forming a triple-layer allusion. The first level of the allusion is related to the song, the second to the fairy-tale, but it is then complicated by the pun with the name Virginia Woolf, which has the effect of expansion. These receive a change in tone as the marker recurs in the play as a chant sang by different characters on several occasions. This variation, however, will be the subject of further discussion later on.

Let us consider first the allusion to the song and the story of “The Three Little Pigs.” As the reference to a nursery tale is likely to raise a few prejudiced eyebrows, I quote Kair Elam:

Needless to say, intertextual relations are not confined to other plays and performances. The theatrical frame is never, in this regard, “pure”, since the performance is liable to draw upon any number of *cultural, topical and popular references* assuming various kinds of extra-theatrical competence on the part of the spectator.⁸⁵ (emphasis added)

Alluding text:	Albee’s play
Sign with the marker:	Title and song “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?”
Marking aspect of the sign:	Melody and pattern: Who’s Afraid of...?
Sign with marked elements:	“Who’s afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?” (song)
Evoked text:	Fairy tale “The three little pigs”
Referent:	Careless attitude towards fear of “Virginia Woolf”

⁸⁵ ELAM, Kair. *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*. (London : Methuen, 1980). p.93, emphasis added.

Referent ₁ :	Careless attitude towards fear of the wolf
Local interpretation:	George and Martha (and their guests) have fun and games instead of facing the reality of their condition (not afraid of “Virginia Woolf”). They build a fragile “house/home” out of illusion and self-deception.
Local interpretation ₁ :	The little pigs have fun and games instead of facing the reality of the impending danger upon them (the Big Bad Wolf). They build their houses out of straw and wood.
Local interpretation ₂ :	As a result of the intertextual patterning, George’s speech gains additional connotations: emphasizing thereby the couple’s self-deception, the escapist nature of the games they play, the fragility of their arrangements.
Optional activations:	Hints to the final failure of their fantasy: the straw house will be blown down. They refuse to listen to wiser voices (maybe their own conscience). Martha is oblivious of George’s warnings.

The audience might not be aware of the allusion to the fairy tale at first, but full recognition will come with the melody that is added by the actors. The local interpretations then are possible, with the identification of similar patterns: an escapist attitude towards impending danger and its consequent fragility.

The optional activations, in this case, should include as much of the contrasts as of the similarities between the referring and the referred texts. In “The Three Little Pigs,” two of the pigs “play and laugh and fiddle” while the third is busy at work. His awareness of the danger represented by the wolf allows him no time to play games. His brothers have finished building their houses, but theirs are much less resistant, made of straw and wood. Eventually,

their supposed shelters are blown down by the wolf and they are saved by their “earnest” brother, whose masonry is “wolf-proof.”

The characters in the play are easily equated in their function to the pigs in the story (and I do not mean simply George’s imitation of a pig in Act I). Having just come in from a party, Martha tries to “play on” by inviting guests to their house, to which her husband objects. So, when their guests have arrived, she chants “Who’s afraid of Virginia Woolf?,” Honey joins in the singing, but George remains serious. Does he play the role of the “serious pig”? Can he warn the others with “I’ll be safe and you’ll be sorry when the wolf comes to your door”? To a certain extent, such identification is possible, but we must allow for an ironic twist. When threatened by the disclosure of painful truth, it is George who resorts to play and fiddle:

George: *(Under her, then covering, to drown her)*
 I said, don’t. All right... all right: *(sings)*
 Who’s afraid of Virginia Woolf,
 Virginia Woolf,
 Virginia Woolf,
 Who’s afraid of Virginia Woolf,
 early in the morning.

George and Honey: *(Who joins in drunkenly)*
 Who’s afraid of Virginia Woolf,
 Virginia Woolf,
 Virginia Woolf... *(etc.)* (p. 85)

On the whole, however, correspondences are not at all clear, the distinctions between serious and playful having become blurred, and there are other references and parallels besides that of the fairy tale. I have combined in the scheme above the elements from both the story and the song, but before proceeding to the next level of the allusion, I include the full lyrics to the pigs’ song, for the sake of illustration:

The original song reads:

“Who’s Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?” (from “The Three Little Pigs”)

I build my house of straw.
I build my house of hay.
I toot my flute and don’t give a hoot
And play around all day.

I build my house of sticks.
I build my house of twigs.
With a hey-diddle-diddle I play on my fiddle
And I dance all kinds of jigs.

I build my house of stones.
I build my house of bricks.
I have no chance to sing and dance.
‘Cause work and play don’t mix.

See him work while we are gay.
He works and works the live-long day.
He don’t take no time to play, time to play, time to play.
All he does is work all day. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!

You can play and laugh and fiddle.
Don’t think you can make me sore.
I’ll be safe and you’ll be sorry
When the wolf comes to your door.
Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha,
Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!

Who’s afraid of the Big Bad Wolf? Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!
I’ll punch him in the nose.
I’ll tie him in a knot.
I’ll kick him in the chin.
We’ll put him on the spot!

Who’s afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?
The Big Bad Wolf, the Big Bad Wolf?
Who’s afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?
La-la-la-la-la.

Who’s afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?
The Big Bad Wolf, the Big Bad Wolf?
Who’s afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?
La-la-la-la-la. (©1933 by Bourne Co.)

The replacement of “Virginia Woolf” for “the Big Bad Wolf” in the song adds another layer to the allusion. The wolf would have sufficed to symbolize the danger surrounding the characters in the play, but “Virginia Woolf,” besides fitting the sound pattern in the song perfectly—three syllables, with a stress in the middle syllable—makes it clearer what is at stake: the fictions that one creates to protect their self-esteem, which in turn is symbolized by the straw house built by the pig in the story. As the marker is the name of a real person, the alluded “text” becomes that person’s biography, written or not, and the possible activations include Virginia Woolf’s recurrent mental breakdowns after the death of her brother Thoby—which was fictionalized in *Jacob’s Room* (1922)—her perception of an inner life much richer than the external “reality,” the final attack of mental illness that drove her to suicide in the river Ouse. These relate somehow to Martha’s addiction to an inner reality, in which she is a mother, and her collapse after the “death” of her son.

Once more, the allusion proves its capacity to be multi-layered and endlessly regressive, for Albee’s own explanation of the title adds another level, by pointing to yet another source text, unsuspected and of an unexpected kind; he states that he derived this title from a sign he had read in a Greenwich Village bar, and that it means, “Who’s afraid of life without false illusions?”

3.4 Jumping to conclusions or “The Story of the Three Piglets”

The advantages of approaching the analysis of *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* from the game perspective can be easily demonstrated. The following passage is quoted not in order to be mocked, but to illustrate that to neglect the ludic elements of the play might lead to a distorted interpretation:

That Albee meant more by his play is revealed in its title. ... 'Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf?' are the words of a humorous song danced and sung by *faculty wives* at a faculty party. Several times the two faculty wives of the two couples joke about this song-and-dance and sing snatches of it, regarding it as extremely hilarious, more so than the men. Later, it becomes the *battle song* of the historian *whenever he is moved to defy his destructive wife*. One is constrained to regard these words with deep curiosity; they must contain in condensed form much of what Albee's play is about, perhaps telling even more than Albee himself is aware. Of course, in seeking the profounder meaning of *such a nonsense phrase (a little reminiscent of the single-sentence irrational problems of Zen Buddhism)*, one examines one's own associations in the hope that they will duplicate, after subtraction of the purely personal, what Albee meant and—if he succeeded as a playwright—what he communicated to his audience even if inchoate in their minds.

Superficially, 'Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf?' suggests to me: *Who's afraid of the intellectual woman, since Virginia Woolf in the English-speaking literary world represents such a woman, able to lead as a critic and a writer among the most cerebral of men*. As sung by the faculty wives, the refrain seems dual and ambivalent: *we faculty wives—witness our light-hearted song-and-dance—are really not so intellectual as Virginia Woolf and we are a little jealous and afraid of the intellectual type whom our husbands may prefer*; and, less clearly, speaking of our men, though intellectuals (mostly), *they are often insecure as males in the presence of the intellectually outstanding woman and they are afraid of the Virginia Woolf in us, since we are not as unintellectual as our song-and-dance may seem—we could compete effectively with them if we permitted ourselves to*. My guess is that the first statement is what the audience hears, particularly the women, and the second is what the men hear, particularly the two professors in the play, who didn't think the skit funny.

Virginia Woolf might be replaced by other famous women of intellectual stamp (but offhand a good substitute is hard to find), yet Albee was insistent. *The reason, I think, is that the phrase is a parody of the nursery song from the fable of the piglets: 'Who's afraid of the big bad wolf?' As we know, the piglets were very much afraid of the wolf—and with good reason: Their song certainly was a whistling-in-the-dark to keep up their courage*. Certainly *the success of the wolf in the fable* is known to us all. The allusive pun on Virginia Woolf's name adds zest to the words of the song-and-dance routine and to the title of Albee's play. (emphasis added)⁸⁶

⁸⁶ LAMPORT, Harold. "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" In: GASSNER, J., (Ed.). *Best American Plays : Fifth Series 1957-1963*. (New York : Crown, 1973). p.146-7. I do not think quoting at length is very recommendable in general, but in this case it proved necessary; besides, it was already a full page quotation in the source text.

First of all, it is nowhere stated that the song is sung and “danced” *only* by faculty wives. My next objection here is to the word “whenever,” because George sings the song only twice, and in none of the occasions, as we have suggested earlier, is George defying his wife. He sings it earlier, out of despair, in an attempt to detract attention from his wife’s revelation of his failures in the past, so that the song constitutes an escape from reality. Later he sings it when he returns from the kitchen, this time to indicate his arrival and to give an impression of “innocence,” so that it is never a real “battle song.”

As for the title itself, he first states that it is a nonsense phrase “a little reminiscent of the single-sentence irrational problems of Zen Buddhism.” Now, this impression of a profounder meaning beyond reason like that of Zen problems leads him astray from the capacity of the allusion involved in the title to anchor it to a specific meaning; one might be reminded of a question like “Who can become muddy and yet, settling, slowly become limpid?”⁸⁷ but the latter is more allegorical and independent, calling for deep thinking and meditation for its solution, whereas the title of the play has a more parodic nature and needs comparison and analysis to be solved. Consider how the title can be answered quite precisely by Martha’s “I am,” while the Zen problem resists such simplification. By employing a method of allusion analysis as we have done, we can make sense of what seems to be merely “nonsense,” and find the comparison with a Zen Buddhist irrational problem is misplaced.

In the play, there is no indication whatsoever of the characters’ fear of intellectual women, nor of the husbands’ preference for them, nor of the wives’ jealousy. Here the critic was misled by his own perception of Virginia Woolf as

⁸⁷ From the *Tao Te Ching*, as quoted by John Fowles in his short story “The Enigma.” In: BRADBURY, M., (Ed.). *The Penguin Book of Modern British Short Stories* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex : Penguin, 1988). p. 189.

an intellectual, independent woman, without stretching the reference to include other details of her biography which might be relevant (and proved to be). The fact that Albee was so insistent on the title proves that Virginia Woolf could *not* have been replaced by “other famous women of intellectual stamp,” for the allusion in the title is not to her as a “type,” a member of a class, but as an individual, herself, with a specific biography.

The critic is right in stating that the sound pattern—number of syllables, stress and end rhyme—of “Virginia Woolf” fits the nursery song, which also accounts for its choice; nevertheless, he did not seem to take the allusion to the story of the “piglets” seriously enough. Even a brief reading of the story and the lyrics to the song would have brought to light the three serious mistakes that make him miss the whole point of the allusion. First, the little pigs who sing the song are precisely those which were *not* afraid enough of the wolf to spend their time in building resistant shelters, and made fun of the one that did. The lines of their song, such as “I toot my flute and don’t give a hoot / and play around all day” or “I’ll punch [the wolf] in the nose / I’ll tie him in a knot / I’ll kick him in the chin / We’ll put him on the spot!,” sound very strange for “piglets [that] were very much afraid.” Second, “whistling-in-the-dark” is the very *opposite* of the function of the song; the pigs sang it out of defiance for the danger represented by the wolf and also used it to tease and make fun of their earnest brother: “See him work while we are gay / he works and works the live-long day / he don’t take no time to play” Finally, what is “known to us all” is certainly the *failure* of the wolf in capturing and devouring the pigs.

So, we observe how Mr Lamport’s sensitivity allowed him to perceive a deeper meaning in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* that was also reflected in its title. He was equally able to locate the two references made. When interpreting

the information, however, he was misled by his own resources into underestimating the role of a fairy tale (and overestimating the role of Virginia Woolf as a literary figure) in the play. Although absolutely no method is faultless, the analysis of the play from a ludic perspective would have prevented the mistakes pointed out above, making for a better evaluation of the material under scrutiny.

Similarly, other interpretations have been drawn in which allegorical aspects of the play are highlighted, or which seek to investigate the characters' homosexuality, for instance. I do not mean that such interpretations are not valid, nor do I subscribe to them, but only that the ludic seems to be much more prevalent than these aspects. The relevance of the approach taken in this study is that it accounts for much of what other methods failed to detect, and at the same time offers a wider coverage of the characteristics of the play and a unifying view of the multiplicity of elements scattered in it as if at random.

3.5 More than words

It should be noted how the marker of the allusion pervades the complex of simultaneous theatrical signs. The allusion to *Beyond the Forest* is marked not only in Martha's speech, but also in her voice, facial expression and gestures, as she attempts to imitate Bette Davis⁸⁸ (and throughout the play we become aware

⁸⁸ We should keep in mind, however, that Martha is *not* attempting to imitate Rose (the character in the film), but Bette Davis's *characterization* of Rose, described by Higham as: "Bette foi incapaz de lidar com a inteligência séria e controlada de Vidor [o diretor]. E exagerava na compensação por tal falha e pela fraqueza do enredo, assumindo um procedimento fantástico. Usava uma comprida peruca negra, maquilagem berrante e horríveis vestidos estampados, utilizando ao máximo seus maneirismos vocais e gestos extravagantes numa paródia um tanto desesperada de si mesma. Foi o início de uma nítida mudança em sua abordagem de interpretação: uma espécie de exagero de todos os elementos que a distinguiam como atriz." HIGHAM, Charles. *Bette Davis*. Trad. Luiz Horácio da Matta (Rio de Janeiro : Francisco Alves, 1983).

of her exaggerated ways, as parallel to those of Bette Davis's character in *Beyond the Forest*), and even in the setting, as both scenes take place in a modest living room the protagonist has just entered, having come from outside. Later on, George delivers his "Flores; flores para los muertos" (p. 195) in a "hideously cracked falsetto" (p. 195) in the doorway, behind a bunch of flowers. Besides that, the marker "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" is sung in the playful style of the original tune in the referred text, and on one occasion George even dances around holding hands with Honey, expanding the identification with the story of the little pigs. Therefore, the dancing, the singing, the setting, the gesture and acting perform the role of markers, or co-markers, along with the speech.

The allusions (and those are by no means the only ones) are aided by other forms of parallels. The paintings, pieces of furniture, objects, the constant drinking, all of these might work as references to external sources, such as the American campus environment or another play—*A Long Day's Journey Into Night*, for instance, and comment on them indirectly. Their more immediate function, however, addresses the formation and solution of the enigmas in the play.

3.6 The voice of truth

There is always an element of expectation in the reception of a literary work, that is the tension of an outcome, the buildup of suspense, the seeking of a solution to a mystery or enigma, followed in turn by the thrill of a surprise, the wonder at the unexpected, the pleasure of fulfillment. And in many texts these features are given extra emphasis, so that they become the major thread in the structuration of the text. Many different elements interact to compose the

code of the enigma, as can be observed in Barthes's definition of the hermeneutic code, which reads as follows:

Let us designate as hermeneutic code (HER) all the units whose function it is to articulate in various ways a question, its response, and the variety of chance events which can either formulate the question or delay its answer; or even, constitute an enigma and lead to its solution.⁸⁹

The units of articulation pointed out by Barthes can take many different forms; they could be allusions, words spoken by the characters, their gestures, pictures, etc.—the elements emphasized earlier. These units would then form the three stages of the enigma: question, delays, and answer. The first stage encompasses the thematization, formulation and the proposition of the question/enigma. The delay strategies to be used by the author include the promise of answer, then retarded by snares, ambiguities, suspensions of the answer (suspended answer) and confusion. After all delays comes the disclosure, finally answering the enigma.

The next step in our analysis will be the identification of such units as mentioned above, along with their function in relation to the question and its answer. There are several enigmas formulated, so we will have to concentrate on those on which the overdetermination occurs—mainly the two major enigmas which maintain the suspense throughout the play. The characteristic of the overdetermination is an excess of elements, as the ones that feature the charts below. I will include, in addition to that, the elements that are offered as clues to the solution of the enigma, i. e., the indications of the truth to be revealed in the disclosure. It might be necessary to highlight the fact that Enigma 1 below is not analysed as the question of what the title means—for

⁸⁹ BARTHES, Roland. *S/Z : an Essay*. Trans. Richard Miller (New York : Hill & Wang, 1974). p. 17.

that has been dealt with in the study of the allusions performed above—but as the question explicit in the title.

Enigma 1: title “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?”

ACT I:

Title:	thematization:	Loss of contact with reality, madness, suicide, (song: neglect for precaution, self-delusion) as allusion to “The Three Little Pigs” and to Virginia Woolf
	proposal:	Someone is afraid of “V. W.”, with its implications
	formulation:	“Who’s afraid of V. W.?”
p.12:	snare:	The question is only a joke played at a party
p.23:	truth:	Abstract painting as representation of Martha’s mind
p.24:	truth:	“The mind’s blind eye”
p.25:	partial answer:	George’s reaction to the song (related to the child story) parallels that of the “earnest pig”
p.51:	truth:	Martha is afraid of the bogey man
p.85:	partial answer:	Play (song) as escape from “reality,” self-delusion

ACT II:

p.89:	equivocation:	Martha in a rest home
p.156:	truth:	“I’m rather worried about you. About your mind.”

ACT III:

- p.185: truth: Martha cries all the time, signs of impending breakdown
- p.186: truth: "You've gone crazy too!"
 partial answer: When George sings "...early in the morning", for the morning will bring the answer
- p.241: disclosure: "I am", Martha is afraid of "V. W."

The title poses two interrelated challenges to the audience: what is meant by "Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf?" and what the answer to that question is. The hermeneutic code, along its development as shown above, makes an early proposal and formulation of the enigma, then delays the answer by means of a wide range of strategies till the final revelation in the last scene. Nevertheless, a number of clues are provided for the reader/spectator, and so often that in hindsight it seems incredible that the audience should not unravel the mystery at once; but that view neglects the very important factor of the audience's uncertainty (if not total puzzlement) about the meaning of the question in the formulation of the enigma.

Enigma 2: The Kid**ACT I:**

- p.18: proposal: "Don't start on the bit."
 thematization: the kid (Martha and George's son)
 equivocation: leave the kid out of this (a real boy)
- p.29: truth: thing, not a person
- p.39: (related enigma: formulation: What are the women doing upstairs?)
 formulation: "You (have any kids)?"
 proposal: "That's for me to know and you to find out."

- p.40: partial truth: "People do... have kids (pause)"
- p.44: (related enigma: disclosure: Martha has told Honey about the kid)
snare: "A son, tomorrow's his birthday."
- p.69: snare (to audience): "When is your son coming home?"
- p.70: partial answer: "You brought *it* out in the open."
truth: "Sorry I brought *it* up."
- p.71: equivocation: the problem is whose kid he is
partial answer: "I wouldn't conceive..."
- p.72: truth: "Martha is lying."
truth: blond-eyed, blue-haired (hint a lying)
truth: son is a joint creation
- p.74: truth: Martha is lying, inventing
- p.83: truth: "The 'you-know-what'"
- ACT III:
- p.97: partial answer: insane people don't grow old (Martha acts like a child)
truth: "Martha doesn't have pregnancies."
- p.98: snare: "...just one... one boy."
truth: "...a comfort, a bean bag."
- p.110: partial truth: creation of Martha's stepmother
- p.119: snare: "When our son was a little boy..."
- p.121: truth: "I never want to talk about *it*."
- p.141: equivocation: "*Child*-mentioner."
truth: "True or *false*?"
- p.179: partial answer: inventing someone
- p.180: equivocation: "Our son is dead."

ACT III:

- p.187: truth: "...the unreality of the world..."
- p.197: snare: "Sonny-boy's birthday"
- p.200: suspended answer: "I don't know when you're lying, or what..."
- p.209: equivocation: "Play this one to the dead."
- p.215: formulation: "Oh, you have a child?"
- suspended answer: "Do we ever!"
- p.215: equivocation: (composed by the elements below)
- snare: "We have a child."
- truth: different versions
- p.220: partial answer: blue, green, brown (description is indifferent)
- p.222: equivocation: (combination of the elements below)
- snare: a real mother
- truth: irony
- p.225: truth: "Lies! lies!"
- p.231: equivocation: (combination of truth and snare)
- truth: "The boy isn't coming."
- snare: Because he died
- truth: "You cannot do that, you cannot decide that."
- p.233: snare: "He doesn't have the power."
- equivocation: power over life and death (literal vs. figurative)
- p.235: partial answer: "You know the rules, Martha. (...) I have killed him."
- p.236: suspended answer: "I think I understand this."
- p.238: disclosure: "You couldn't have any" (answer: "No, we couldn't.")

It takes the whole length of their participation in the play for the guests, at least Nick, to realise that George and Martha do not have a real son. To understand that they never had any children is to understand that they had been playing a game all the time, a game which now is over. Their combat is a fight for the rights over an invention, and the ability to support and manipulate a myth. The articulation of the elements of the hermeneutic code related to this enigma is done in such a way that many clues were provided, but there were just as many snares, so that the suspense was maintained till the end. We should also observe that the proposal, thematization and formulation of the enigma of the kid follows those of the enigma in the title, and its disclosure precedes that of the latter. This framing of the enigma of the kid corresponds to the guests involvement in the play; in other words, their arrival coincides with the proposal of the enigma of the kid whereas its solution immediately precedes their departure. We are thus reminded of the strong connection between their presence and the enigma. The relevance of this connection becomes clear in the discussion that follows.

3.7 Two plays in search of guests

It is especially important to observe that just as the overdetermination of the hermeneutic code sets the reader/viewer as both adversary or cooperator in the flow of the play, it also suggests that the voices in the text may acknowledge and be directed at different types of readers/viewers. The bits of truth, scattered as clues along the play, as demonstrated above, are not perceived as such by the uninitiated reader/viewer, who will be misled by the various snares and equivocations left in the path like traps for the naive

travellers. These will need to wait until the final disclosure to know the truth, or might not see it even then, just as the drunken Honey who does not seem to follow her husband's grasp of the key to the whole mystery.

It is necessary to keep in mind the balance of clues and delays employed by the author, because it corresponds to a fundamental principle in the organization of games, so intrinsic to the ludic that it can be found in the most primitive forms of game, even in the playful behaviour of animals: restraint. In Goffman's words:

The pattern for fighting is not followed fully, but rather is systematically altered in certain aspects [...] In brief, there is a transcription or transposition [...] of a strip of fighting behavior into a strip of play [...] The playful act is so performed that its ordinary function is not realized. *The stronger and more competent participant restrains himself sufficiently to be a match for the weaker and less competent.*⁹⁰ (added emphasis)

When young lion cubs play at fighting, for instance, they use all the gestures and moves that characterize real fight—although these are sometimes downkeyed through exaggeration—but an implicit rule is to refrain from hurting each other. When one of them overdoes the attack and hurts another, the victim cries signalling the end of the game; the frame has been broken due to a breach of the rules. This means that the stronger animal has to withhold its full power in order to play, and thus the balance between opponents is at least partly guaranteed.⁹¹ A similar restraint is observed in all sorts of games, in the form of rules that limit the moves and play area, establish the same number of participants on each side, set down penalties, etc. The relevance of restraint in

⁹⁰ GOFFMAN, Ervin. *Frame Analysis : an Essay on the Organization of Experience*. (chapter 3). (Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1974). p. 41.

⁹¹ For further information on the characteristics of animal playful behaviour, see Uta HENSCHHEL's article "Zeit zum Spielen." in: *Geo : das Reportage-Magazin*, 6 (Hamburg : Juni 1995).

the case of literary games is that it explains why the author provides clues along with the snares. He holds all the power to himself, controls the quality and flow of the information, so he could have given the reader/spectator mostly obstacles, but he restrained himself from doing so in order to maintain a manageable balance of power.⁹² The reader/viewer is given many chances of guessing the truth, so that the game is not totally biased. Thus, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* can be said to offer a balance of competition, with the challenges posed to motivate the audience, and cooperation, in the clues and hints scattered along the text. The audience might not discover the truth until the end of the play, but the recognition of the clues, in hindsight, prevents them from feeling cheated.

At this point, however, we touch the most sensitive spot in the relation between Albee and the share of his audience who reject the mythical son as a "cheap trick." My view is that their criticism really stands as a complaint along the lines of: Why did you make us believe we were watching a realistic play? In that case, what happens is that the audience not only fails to recognize the clues to the truth in relation to the enigmas, but also to detect all the clues as to the downkeying of the naturalistic theatrical conventions, metatheatrical devices and playful elements in the play as a whole. The relation between the two enigmas described above is one powerful clue to those characteristics, in that it alters the roles played by hosts and guests into those of audience and performers.

Although the presence of the guests in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* parallels the witnessing of the play by the audience, that is even more clearly

⁹² Indeed, the fact that he started writing is already a concession of information, but this could have been so misleading as to become disqualified as information. What I mean in the text is not the total suppression of data, but simply the offer of merely irrelevant or "wrong" information.

the case of the theatre-goers, who share with Nick and Honey the physical, simultaneous presence in the space of the theatre. Therefore, the theatrical audience is better equipped to identify with either of them, or none, thus taking a third position as witnesses. Now, those positions exemplify the three different levels of audience awareness we have mentioned: the initiated audience for whom the clues would suffice for the early perception of the nature of Martha and George's "parenthood," and for whom the text is cooperative; the uninitiated who, like Nick, take long to discover the truth, and for whom it comes as a revelation ("Jesus Christ, I think I understand this," page 236); and the third group, related to Honey's position, who are baffled by the whole arrangement, for whom the "cooperation" was not enough and therefore might still believe they have seen George eat the telegramme.

We should keep in mind that the comments above are valid for the development of Enigma 2, the enigma of the son, in the Hermeneutic code. As concerns Enigma 1, a different relation is established, and it is here that the diverse orientation of the voices in the text becomes clear. This enigma, although it is present throughout the play, is never really proposed, thematized or formulated as such to the intrafictional audience (Nick and Honey), who sees it rather as a joke. This audience is offered the same clues as the extrafictional audience, but not the same awareness of their relevance. So, at the end of the play, the guests leave before the final disclosure of the truth for Enigma 1, which was not actually addressed to them. The disclosure in "I... am... George" closes the dramatic frame opened with the title of the play, a question has been formulated and an answer has been provided, and now the extradigetic audience can take leave of the theatre in their turn exactly like the "guests" have done.

The cleverness of this sophisticated set of games (that parallel other games) played by the author is obviously one of the main achievements of the play. The co-occurrence of two different audiences in the fashion demonstrated above, along with the parallelism of the two hermeneutic lines, shows that in fact there are two simultaneous “tracks” of perception, two distinct plays being performed at the same time. The first, internal one, performed by George and Martha, having Nick and Honey as audience and “the kid” as its enigma, and which could take on Albee’s original title for the play—later turned into the title for Act III—The Exorcism. This play, watched by the guests, is framed inside the play watched by the actual theatre-goers (or movie-goers, but there would be a further distance between the audiences), *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, and belongs to the disattended track for the intrafictional audience.

For the purposes of our discussion in this work, the significance of the framing of the plays stands out. There is a development through clearly defined steps by means of which the plot proves complex and well-elaborated, rather than “amorphous.” The numerous allusions provided points of contact with other texts, allowing for a dialogue between different styles and conventions, naturalism included. Narcissistically drawing attention to itself as artifice, the play undermines the naturalistic surface which surrounds it as a halo, but does not constitute its core, as some would like to believe. So the way is paved for a more flexible, symbolic interpretation of the play, its elements and resources.

Chapter IV

THE GAME OF THE WORD

Language, under these conditions, is a highly ambiguous business. So often, below the word spoken, is the thing known and unspoken. [...] Between my lack of biographical data about [my characters] and the ambiguity of what they say lies a territory which is not only worth of exploration but which it is compulsory to explore.

Harold Pinter

4.1 Signalling the game

It is in his mastery of language and dialogue that Albee reveals most of his skill as a dramatist. Evans, for instance, points out Albee's amazing versatility in the development of language forms and styles, as well as his superb ability in demonstrating and explicating certain aspects characteristic to Americanism through the dialogue of his plays. Lumley⁹³ goes further to admit that *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* has some of the best dialogue in American theatre, an opinion shared by Wilson.⁹⁴ One obvious asset to the play is Albee's skill in producing the precise distortions pertinent to dialogue heavily laced with bourbon, which accounts for its special texture and content, repetition and exaggeration, frankness of expression, neglect of social conventions and unrestrained playfulness. In its richness and variety, the dialogue suggests a

⁹³ LUMLEY, Frederick. *New Trends in 20th Century Drama : a Survey Since Ibsen and Shaw*. (New York : Oxford University Press, 1972).

⁹⁴ WILSON, Garff B. *Three Hundred Years of American Drama and Theatre : from Ye Bare and Ye Cubb to Hair*. (Englewood Cliffs, N. J. : Prentice-Hall, 1973).

wide range of implications beneath the humourous and the banal, to which we now turn.

At the beginning of the play, Martha surprises her husband and the viewers/readers with her question: "What a dump. Hey, what's that from? 'What a dump!'" (p. 3). The question "Hey, what's that from?" signals to George that the phrase "What a dump!" has a special status; it is not one of Martha's sentences, it is not meant as an ordinary referential message.⁹⁵ In fact, it deviates from the regular flow of communication, and constitutes a bracket in it which has its own rules and an end in itself. That is the game Martha is challenging her husband to play: trying to guess/remember the title of the film which she is quoting from, actually imitating a character from. For George, guessing it wrong means failing and losing the game, whereas not engaging the game would mean spoiling the fun.

On another level, but in a similar way, the same question works as a marker to the viewer/reader, to the effect that what follows the signal/marker is a sort of game, with rules that might not be those expected by the audience, and a special performance lies ahead. The author (encoded author) is being extremely ironical by using one character to warn another and the audience at the same time of the playful nature of the performance. Even more so because he is employing language to signal the language games to be played.

The ludic elements already analysed in the previous chapters are mostly revealed in and through language. This time, however, I am taking the hint from Martha to study in further detail aspects which are more related to language itself, what we could call "word games" or "word play," but not restricted solely to puns and jokes by the characters. The definition I quote stresses the "serious"

⁹⁵ "Message" as in Roman Jakobson's diagram of communication.

aspect as well as the humorous, by stating that word play is “the exploitation of linguistic phenomena—and of the underlying theoretical principles—to create situational humor ... and to provide a commentary on the nature of language itself”⁹⁶ (emphasis added). This brings to mind George’s teasing of Nick in Act I with “Good, better, best, bested. ... How do you like that for a declension, young man? Eh?” (p. 32), where the fact that language itself is being questioned comes to light.

Word play occurs invariably even in the most serious of literary works, for one reason or another, and it would be of no special concern to us here if it were not for the number and range of its instances in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* These include allusion, ambiguity, imitation, irony, montage, nonsense, paradox, puns, quotations, rhyme, riddles, among others. Each of the items above will be the subject of survey further on, for our analysis begins with a discussion of larger elements, i. e. the dialogue in the play.

4.2 The battle of wits

The dramatic dialogue is created specifically for the stage, and it has an audience that does not take active part in the dialogue, thus forming a triangular interactional system. Based on these principles, three main features stand out in the dramatic dialogue: its cumulative capacity, counter-speech, and its “acting and reading signals.”⁹⁷ The acting and reading signals refer to the special status enjoyed by the audience in the theatrical context, that of being the third party in an interaction that apparently involves only two others, the characters. The

⁹⁶ SUTHERLAND, Robert. *Language and Lewis Carroll* (The Hague : Paris, 1970). p.28.

⁹⁷ KENNEDY, Andrew K. *Dramatic Dialogue : The Duologue of Personal Encounter* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1983). p.10.

words exchanged on the stage are also directed at the audience, but the latter is located at a physical and symbolic distance. This triangular aspect of theatrical communication makes it a very special speech act, and has to be taken into consideration in the analysis of even the shortest utterance on stage, let alone in the study of the overall patterns of dialogue.

The role of the audience as a third party in the dramatic dialogue gains in complexity in plays like *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, where the distance between audience and stage is challenged by the presence of Nick and Honey as a secondary audience on the stage, through which the main audience can focus the action of the hosts. This allows an element of undecidability to be interposed in the dialogue as concerns the direction of the utterance. In other words, a speech coming from either George or Martha might be aimed at their guests directly, and "overheard" by the theater-goers, or alternatively directed at the spectators themselves, an ironic situation in which the guests become indirect addressees. We will analyse this situation in more detail in the next chapter, when we study the various levels of audience in the play.

The cumulative power of dramatic dialogue means that "behind the immediate dialogue sequence lies the totality of the play and its language."⁹⁸ It can be easily exemplified in the play. Let us take the opening sequence. The texture, the different styles of speech, the game and the allusion presented in the first scene between George and Martha work together to form a "network" of elements that will be developed, or expanded (to use Riffaterre's term),⁹⁹ throughout the dialogue of the play. On the other hand, a length of dialogue can be chosen from the middle or end of the play to show how each exchange

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁹⁹ RIFFATERRE, Michael. *Semiotics of Poetry*. 1. Paperback ed. (London : Methuen, 1980). p. 12.

reflects the whole of the previous patterns of interaction between the characters, as though it were the latest layer added to a palimpsest where traces are still visible of earlier writing. For instance, the “Get the Gests” scene in Act II draws upon the humiliation caused to George by Martha, their history of conflict, the threaten represented by Nick, Honey’s physical characteristics, the stories told by Nick, George and Martha, the build-up of aggressiveness and so on.

Counter-speech is described by Kennedy as “the couterpointing of verbal styles whereby the speakers talk to each other in sharply opposed or ‘orchestrated’ speech-styles.”¹⁰⁰ Having investigated the pairing of characters in the play in the previous chapter, we are well equipped to review their differences in terms of speech-styles. Sharp opposition perfectly describes the contrast of Martha’s outspoken, loud, aggressive style, full of expletives and *double entendres*, to Honey’s quiet, non-assertive naivety. George also opposes Nick’s pragmatic social manners with sarcastic/ironic, creative language. Observe the “orchestration” of the contrasts mentioned in the following sequence:

- Martha: Ha, ha, ha, HA! Make the kids a drink, George. What do you want, kids? What do you want to drink, hunh?
- Nick: Honey? What would you like?
- Honey: I don’t know, dear... A little brandy, maybe. “Never mix—never worry.”
(*She giggles*)
- George: Brandy? Just brandy? Simple; simple. (*Moves to the portable bar*) What about you... uh....
- Nick: Bourbon on the rocks, if you don’t mind.
- George: (*As he makes drinks*) Mind? No, I don’t mind. I don’t think I mind. Martha? Rubbing alcohol for you?
- Martha: Sure. “Never mix—never worry.”
- George: Martha’s tastes in liquor have come down... simplified over the years... crystallized. Back when I was courting Martha—well, I

¹⁰⁰ KENNEDY, Andrew K. *Dramatic Dialogue : The Duologue of Personal Encounter* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1983). p.10.

don't know if that's exactly the right word for it—but back when
I was courting Martha...

Martha: (Cheerfully) Screw, sweetie! (p. 23)

It is with Martha and George that the texture—variety and complexity of individual speech—of dialogue acquires special importance for the role it plays in the balance between the protagonists; and they are, accordingly, aware of each other's verbal style. George's inventive use of language is praised at one point (by Martha) as having "a Dylan Thomas-y" (p.24) quality to it. But criticism is more frequent in their exchanges, as we will have the opportunity to see below.

Before turning to more specific functions of the dramatic dialogue between the protagonists in the play, it might be profitable to consider its general functions. Dramatic dialogue aims at the verbal interaction between individuals in search for significance and a "flexible state of being with others through speech."¹⁰¹ This objective is achieved by means of the exchange of values, the contact of different personal worlds in the scenes of "close encounter," which defines the "duologue of personal encounter."¹⁰² The measure of this contact is greatly affected by the degree of sincerity or dissembling of those involved. In this complex trade of values, the characters change, moving towards sympathy or alienation. But how do these concepts apply to the four characters is *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

The situation which "traps" the four participants, i. e. hosts and guests, is unfavourable to the search of significance. As shown before, the personal verbal contact of the characters is controlled by the psychological games played, so

¹⁰¹ KENNEDY, Andrew K. *Dramatic Dialogue : The Duologue of Personal Encounter* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1983). p. 12.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

that most of the time is spent on dissembling rather than on being sincere. As the hosts contradict each other, the guests' uncertainty prevents the real exchange of values, and there is never any guarantee as to the status—fantasy or reality—of what is being offered for contact through the words and behaviour of the guests. Even when disclosures of a character's past are made, the change provoked is not one of sympathy, for the information is held like a potential weapon against each other. In their first moment alone together, George and Nick's conversation does not lead to further understanding between them. Although Nick tries to be as polite as possible, George does not cooperate; he ironizes, fails to listen, plays jokes and takes the opportunity to measure his guest as an opponent rather than as a person trying to establish some rapport. Later on, Nick's revelation of the reasons behind his marriage to Honey are exchanged with George's story of a grand day in his past, but the latter's disclosure is disguised, distorted. Instead of a real exchange of values, what takes place is the one-sided advantage acquired by George of a secret. In George's words: "You realize, of course, that I've been drawing you out on this stuff, not because I'm interested in your terrible lifehood, but only because you represent a direct and pertinent threat to my lifehood, and I want to get the goods on you" (p. 111). And by so admitting his intentions, he comes closest to a sincere dialogue. Similarly, Honey and Martha's dialogue in private proves to have been on the subject of Martha's son, and again the interference of lies stands in the way to real personal encounter. Besides that, the other instances of contact are strongly marked by competition and conflict, which moves the characters away from sympathy towards alienation.

It is true that most of the dialogue in the play is between George and Martha, either directly or indirectly, for the guests are used as audience and

“mirrors” that reflect their attack on each other. This mirror-audience function helps to explain how so many shattering revelations are made by the hosts before their guests; the sort of dialogue only possible “naturally” in private. Martha epitomizes this position in her speech “We’re alone” below:

- George: (*To them all*) I didn’t want to talk about him at all ... I would have been perfectly happy not to discuss the whole subject.... I never want to talk about it.
- Martha: Yes you do.
- George: When we’re alone, maybe.
- Martha: We’re alone!
- George: Uh ... no, love ... we’ve got guests. (p. 121)

Martha and George’s long, continuous dialogue also avoids sympathy. The fight is an old one, what is added is probably just an increase in intensity, and they do not really listen to each other. Their verbal attack has ceased to constitute an exchange of values out of repetition and has become a sort of game to be played for its own sake. I would like to quote Kennedy again, when he points to the two diverging tendencies of dramatic duologue: “It is tragedy that most often is structured around the interaction of two interlocked protagonists—duologues become pivotal: a duality of worlds moving through sympathy towards union, or else through conflict towards desintegration.”¹⁰³ So, it is ironic that the crescendo of conflict in the play should lead them so far into alienation and desintegration that they end up reunited in sympathy—consider how in the last scene their behaviour is emptied of aggressiveness, just as their speech is emptied of the sarcasm characteristic of earlier exchanges.

Even a moment of such intense sincerity as Martha’s speech in the first pages of Act III falls short of a confessional duologue. She is not really talking

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

to Nick, she is not confessing to him, but in spite of him, so that the dialogue turns into a monologue of self-revelation:

You're all flops. I am the Earth Mother, and you're all flops. (*More or less to herself*) I disgust me. I pass my life in crummy, totally pointless infidelities... (*Laughs ruefully*) *would-be* infidelities. Hump the Hostess? That's a laugh. A bunch of boozed-up... impotent lunk-heads. Martha makes goo-goo eyes, and the lunk-heads grin, and roll their beautiful, beautiful eyes back, and grin some more, and Martha licks her chops, and lunk-heads slap over to the bar to pick up a little courage, *and* they pick up a little courage, and they bounce back over to old Martha, who does a little dance for them, which heats them all up... mentally... and so they slap over to the bar again, and pick up a little more courage, and their wives and sweethearts stick their noses up in the air... right through the ceiling, sometimes... which sends the lunk-heads back to the soda fountain again where they fuel up some more, while Martha-poo sits there with her dress up over her head... suffocating—you don't know how *stuffy* it is with your dress up over your head—suffocating! waiting for the lunk-heads; so, *finally* they get their courage up... but that's all, baby! Oh my! there is sometimes some very nice potential, but, oh my! My, my, my. (*Brightly*) But that's how it is in a civilized society. (*To herself again*) All the gorgeous lunk-heads. Poor babies. (*To Nick, now; earnestly*) There is only one man in my life who has ever... made me happy. Do you know that? One! [...] I mean George, of course. [...] ...George who is out somewhere there in the dark.... George who is good to me, and whom I revile; who understands me, and whom I push off; who can make me laugh, and I choke it back in my throat; who can hold me, at night, so that it's warm, and whom I will bite so there's blood; who keeps learning the games we play as quickly as I can change the rules; who can make me happy and I do not wish to be happy, and yes I do wish to be happy. George and Martha: sad, sad, sad. [...] ...whom I will not forgive for having come to rest; for having seen me and having said: yes; this will do; who has made the hideous, the hurting, the insulting mistake of loving me and must be punished for it. George and Martha: sad, sad, sad. [...] ...who tolerates, which is intolerable; who is kind, which is cruel; who understands, which is beyond comprehension.... [...] Some day... hah! some *night*... some stupid, liquor-ridden night... I will go too far... and I'll either break the man's back... or push him off for good... which is what I deserve. (p.189-191, emphasis added on the bold-type phrases)

4.3 A devil with language

If the play can be seen as a battlefield for Martha and George's dispute, the commonest weapon for both is language. It is mostly by means of words that attack and defense alternate. The first strategy comprises the acquisition and uphold of the verbal control of the situation, or the verbal "dominance."¹⁰⁴ The imbalance in the dialogue of the characters in the play stands out, for Nick and Honey's participation is always overshadowed by the duel between their hosts, which emphasizes the former couple's role as audience to that duel. The dominance of the dialogue is usually tipped towards George, being perhaps the counterfoil to Martha's physical, sensual dominance. In other words, Martha changes her clothes, dances, kisses and seduces, whereas George resorts more often to language to attain his objectives.

There is, however, another perspective to the balance (or imbalance) of the dialogue between them, and here we enter the realm of personal style. Consider Martha's use of language; for instance. Full of expletives—her very first words in the play are "Jesus Christ"—and slang, her style is simpler, more aggressive, and more objective. According to her husband, she is "a devil with language." Compare their language in this exchange:

- Martha: I thought I'd bust a gut; I really did.... I really thought I'd bust a gut laughing. George didn't like it.... George didn't think it was funny at all.
- George: Lord, Martha, do we have to go through this again?
- Martha: I'm trying to shame you into a sense of humor, angel, that's all.
- George: (*over-patiently, to Honey and Nick*) Martha didn't think I laughed loud enough. Martha thinks that unless... *as she demurely puts it... that unless you "bust a gut" you aren't amused. You know? Unless you carry on like a hyena you aren't having any fun.* (p. 25, emphasis added)

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

George tends towards more formal, sophisticated and ironic expression, as exemplified above; and just as he criticised his wife's words in that passage, his style is in turn the victim of criticism from Martha in another: "Have you ever listened to your sentences, George? Have you ever listened to the way you talk? You're so frigging... convoluted... that's what you are. You talk like you were writing one of your stupid papers" (p. 156).

A set of fine examples of their styles can be composed by taking into consideration two instances when they attack each other's esteem. All we have to do is consider how directly Martha acts to reveal George as a failure, and how she goes straight to the point in the matter of his novel, while George, on the other hand, takes a long time in preparation for his attack on her and "their kid." George speaks longer, but it also happens very often that he is not understood, and his goals are not effectively achieved. In this light it would seem, then, that to George's dominance of speech with pompous words, difficult allusions and ironic inversions, Martha opposes a key of expression that hardly ever misses her target, which maintains a certain rhetorical balance in the dialogue as a whole and avoids George's taking full advantage of language on his behalf. But that, again, has to be qualified in terms of the two audiences involved, for George's style has a completely different effect on his guests and on the extrafictional audience. To the latter, more capable of understanding his jokes and games, the scale is tipped towards George.

4.4 Guns and fame

Just as the analysis reveals the verbal styles peculiar to each of the characters, it highlights instances of reversal of those styles. As Nick warns George: "I'll play the charades like you've got 'em set up... *I'll play in your*

language... I'll be what you say I am" (p. 150, emphasis added). At a more basic level, we observe a reversal of the characteristic of physical strategy as opposed to verbal confrontation. The former is the realm of Martha, but in some scenes George resorts to physical action, as when he uses a fake gun to "shoot" his wife and "shut" her mouth, or when he actually tries to strangle her. On the other hand, we see that Martha becomes more "verbal" and less physical towards the end of the play, mainly in Act III, when she even speaks in a style similar to her husband's:

Martha: (*Affects a brogue*) Awww, 'tis the refuge we take when the unreality of the world weighs too heavy on our tiny heads. (*Normal voice again*) Relax; sink into it; you're no better than anybody else. (p. 187-88)

Consider also the way she speaks in her "monologue," especially in the line: "But that's how it is in a civilized society;" or still her sophisticated, literary—with overtones reminiscent of Dickens, or perhaps of the biblical passage of the Sermon on the Mount—style in:

... George who is out somewhere there in the dark.... George who is good to me, and whom I revile; who understands me, and whom I push off; who can make me laugh, and I choke it back in my throat; who can hold me, at night, so that it's warm, and whom I will bite so there's blood; who keeps learning the games we play as quickly as I can change the rules; who can make me happy and I do not wish to be happy, and yes I do wish to be happy. George and Martha: sad, sad, sad. ... who tolerates, which is intolerable; who is kind, which is cruel; who understands, which is beyond comprehension.... (p. 190-91)

Martha tended to see Nick in a favourable light even when George spoke of the "danger" scientists like him represented to culture and freedom, but she seems to borrow George's words when she criticises Nick with "Oh... you know so little. And you're going to take over the world, hunh?" (p. 192). Other instances of momentary assimilations of style include Martha's "Party! Party!"

(p. 17) echoed in Honey's "Violence! Violence!" (p. 135). Also, when George tried to warn Nick about the risks involved in the college career and the local society in Act II, the latter replied with "Up yours" (p. 116). Later, it is Nick's turn to act towards his host paternalistically, and receive "Screw, baby" (p. 197) for an answer.

4.5 Word games

The wealth of language games used by George and Martha is amazing, and once more reveals Albee's skill with dramatic language. What follows is a survey of important word-play techniques found in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* aiming not at covering every single instance, but rather at demonstrating the range and richness of the ludic side of language in the play. This survey includes, in order, phenomena such as adumbration, allusion, quotation, montage and collage, rhyme, imitation, repetition, pun, *double entendre*, ambiguity, inadequacy, paradox, oxymoron, nonsense, riddle, names, swearing contest and irony. These play an essential role in the structuration by aiding in the creation and maintenance of a deeper layer of meaning, as well as by providing access to it, as we shall see in the sequence.

One of the forms of word play that proves significant in this analysis is that of *adumbration*. In adumbration the author "foreshadows" incidents yet to come in the text. This technique is employed extensively by Albee in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, sometimes arising from the characters' dialogues, sometimes from the allusions presented, or even the objects or props, as occurs with the painting and with the fake gun, early indications of mental breakdown and of "murder," respectively. Adumbration through dialogue can be illustrated by the exchange where George tells Martha not to talk about "the bit" and she

replies she will “talk about him if [she wants] to” (p. 19), which foreshadows her breach of their secret and other revelations that will be made. As for the allusions, many of the characteristics of the film alluded to by Martha are confirmed later as occurring in the play as well, whereas death and insanity become predictable from the allusion to “flores para los muertos,” considered in the previous chapter, among others.

Allusions have other functions besides that of adumbration. In the allusion, a sign—a word, sentence, gesture, etc.—works as a marker of the connection between the present text (the alluding text) and an alluded text, which could be a song, a novel, a myth, and so on. The allusion might suggest a parallel, either of contrast or similarity, between the two works. As for explicitness, the allusions range from straightforward reference, as in “What’s that from?” (p. 3), to brief, indirect reference. An instance of indirect allusion occurs when Martha talks about George “who is kind, which is cruel,” (p. 191) a sentence in which we hear the echo of Hamlet’s “I must be cruel only to be kind.”¹⁰⁵

As a textual technique, allusions are widely employed in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, with varying degrees of emphasis or explicitness. Allusions are made to History through the names of places, such as Carthage, Berlin and Gomorrah; or to historical events, such as the Punic Wars and World War II; in addition to the book George reads from. Authors and literary works, like Shakespeare’s Hamlet, Dylan Thomas, and Tennessee Williams’s *A Streetcar Named Desire*, besides science fiction stories (like Huxley’s *Brave New World*, for instance), are also alluded to. There are allusions to films (*Beyond the Forest*) and to songs and pieces of music (“Just a Gigolo,” “Who’s Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?,” Beethoven’s *7th Symphony*, etc.).

¹⁰⁵ SHAKESPEARE, W. *Hamlet*. (London : Penguin, 1994) 3:4. p. 108.

Taking a closer look at the examples of historical allusions suggested above, we notice a series of connections between them. The most immediate is their utterance by only one character: George. This seems logical enough, once he is the historian; but besides that it implies that the significance they have in the story passes through George first. To be more specific, I have pointed out earlier in this chapter that the character George many times voices the implied author's opinions on society, his views on the academic world and his suspicion of progress. So it is clear that the choice of historical places and events plays a particular role in the critical discourse underlying the dialogue. Firstly, the college campus is located in New Carthage, strongly suggestive by itself of a contemporary version of the city and state destroyed by the Romans during the Punic Wars—so intense was the thirst for revenge and devastation that the soil of the area was covered with salt by the winners, so as to make it barren. This toponymic association, aided by George's further reference to the Punic Wars themselves, is twofold in its relevance. On the one hand, George's implying to having witnessed the wars extends the representativeness of the character and of the whole situation of the play to universalize its concerns. In other words, it is suggested that the conflict in the story, as well as the theme of the fear of reality, is nothing new, and has always been present in the western civilization. On the other hand, there is the criticism, attributable to the author, that the academic community of New Carthage is as sterile as the soil of the old Carthago, sterility being already a recurrent motif in the play—compare Honey's unwillingness and Martha's uncapability to conceive, along with George's "abortion" of his novel and Nick's impotence. Other possible connections between these and the other examples mentioned—Gomorra, Berlin and World War II—suggest the close thematic integration of this sort of

historical allusions. To the implication of sin and decay associated with Gomorrah, followed by punishment and destruction, is added the German's provocation of a world war and later consequent punishment and destruction symbolized even today by the original ruins of the *Gedächtniskirche* in Berlin. In addition to that, Gomorrah, Carthage, Berlin are in tune with George's quotation from the history book *Decline of the West*, to the effect that all of these places had their climax and eventually fell because of their lack of adaptability to new situations and conditions, which then sounds as a sort of indictment of the society of New Carthage: "And the west [...] must... eventually... fall" (p. 174).

As a type of warning, such activations between the play and historical discourse also relate closely to the reference to genetic manipulation and consequent loss of individuality. When George mentions the dystopian threat represented by the control of society by an unscrupulous scientific elite, one is immediately reminded, though no titles are ever brought out into the open, of science fiction novels like Huxley's *Brave New World*. This is a literary allusion, and there are others. The activation of literary texts, either directly or indirectly, also fulfils different functions. At the simplest level, they illustrate George's artistic inclination, as commented before in Chapter II (see page 20). The allusion to Dylan Thomas works as a signal to the reader/spectator about the attention devoted by the characters to language and their conscious exploitation of its possibilities, sometimes resulting in neologism. The activation of other plays is revealing of inner traits of the characters. This is the case of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, for it shows in comparison that Martha has been lying, and will eventually break down when her fantasies are exposed as such, just like happened to Blanche. So the allusion enriches the alluding text

through a finer definition of subtle details and shades of meaning and by offering keys to the outcome of the play. This and other implications of this allusion have been shown in Chapter III (see page 54).

Chapter III also features a discussion of the allusion to *Beyond the Forest* (the “What’s that from?” allusion). Being a key to the development of the storyline—as well as helping in the structuration of the text—the reference to the film enhances certain characteristics, like the characters’ self-consciousness, Martha’s frustration, etc. Besides that, there is the identification of a pseudo-parody with related amalgamation of influences from other texts alluded more indirectly to, like *The Bond* and *A Long Day’s Journey Into Night*. Still commenting on the highlighting of characteristics through allusion, we can mention again that of the song “Just a Gigolo,” which further focuses the attention of the audience to the nature of the relationship that is gradually developed between Martha and Nick. It reveals the self-seeking, ambitious interest that draws Nick to his hostess’s bed, as opposed to Martha’s use of him as a weapon against her husband and escape from her routine of frustration, both lines of exploitation ironically baffled in the end.

The playing of the record of Beethoven’s *7th Symphony* also has an intensely ironic effect. The incongruence of the matching of the pairs for the dance and the interplay of half-hidden sly intentions is illustrated in the impact caused to the dancers, frustrated by music they are not able to dance to. If George seems to consent to the dance and seduction, his choice of music reveals his protest and criticism, and thus plays a relevant role in the play. The allusion to the song “Who’s afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?” is even more relevant than the other examples mentioned, and defines many nuances of the characters involved in the story, apart from carrying thematic implications. But for these I

refer the reader to Chapter III above, where this allusion received the proper attention it certainly deserves.

Explicit allusions, like in some of the earlier examples, very often quote directly from the alluded text—in this light, quotations become a specific form of allusion. So it is that a number of *quotations* can be identified in the play. Some obvious examples are: “What a dump!” (p. 3) quoted by Martha from the film *Beyond the Forest*; “Never mix; never worry” (p. 23) quoted by Honey and then Martha from a popular saying; later when George quotes T. Williams, with “Flores para los muertos” (p. 195). Longer quotations are also featured, as George’s reading of a History book—Spengler’s *Decline of the West*: “And the west, encumbered by crippling alliances, and burdened with a morality too rigid to accommodate itself to the swing of events, must... eventually... fall” (p. 174). Longer still is George’s recitation of the *requiem* in Latin, “Absolve, Domine, animas omnium fidelium defunctorum ab omni vinculo delictorum [...] Et gratia tua illis succurente, mereantur evadere iudicium ultionis [...] Et lucis aeternae beatitudine perfrui [...]” (p. 220-221) which goes on for the length of a whole scene, interspersed with Martha’s description of her son’s childhood (p. 221-27). Although the functions of such quotations have been explored in the discussion of the allusions above and in Chapter III, it is not inadequate to remember some at this point. In general terms, besides adding to the structuration of the play as a text by composing the hermeneutic code, the allusions in their variety counteract the adherence to a single source or reference, as some critics believed *The Bond*—or other Strindberg’s plays—to be. Albee activates texts belonging to the most varied traditions, and so emphasizes the metafictional bend of his work, aimed not at parodying one specific work, but at pseudoparodying several. Thus, the parody is

decentralized, no single reference receiving a superior status as the basis for the structuration. The constellation of alluded texts revolves around a nucleus that is, to the end, a void like the one claimed by the deconstruction proponents, in an onion arrangement that resembles the fiction of the imaginary son, with layer after layer of discourse being built around the emptiness of an illusion.

The relevance of the previous comment lies in sensibly reducing the potential for charges of lack of originality. Had Albee intended the play as an adaptation of *The Bond* he would have acknowledged it as such, as happened in the case of *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, or *Malcolm*. Besides that, the connection between *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and other texts is much looser than that of overt adaptations or parodies. Consider how dependent works like Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* are on the parodied text, which in fact supports the whole structure, whereas Albee's play is understandable without any reference to either *Beyond the Forest* or *The Bond*. For example, Stoppard's play acknowledges its debt to Shakespeare in its title; some of its scenes correspond very closely to those of the parodied text; the characters retain their original names; other scenes are complementary to the scenes of *Hamlet*—they are performed in Stoppard's but only mentioned or narrated in Shakespeare's play.¹⁰⁶ *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* has its meaning intrinsically bound to *Hamlet*, on the one hand, and *Waiting for Godot*, on the other; so the relation established between the two plays and the parodying text is essential to an understanding of the latter. This is not the case of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and in comparison, Albee's duplication of elements from either *Beyond the Forest* or *The Bond* is hardly noticeable. In this

¹⁰⁶ For further details, see LEÃO, Liana de Camargo. *Metavisions: Entrances and Exits in Tom Stoppard's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. (MA thesis; Curitiba : UFPR, 1994).

case, the element of parody—or even pseudoparody—enriches the play by adding depth and detail, but does not necessarily determine character, or define plot, or even agree in symbolic and thematic implications (for neither of the parodied plays carries the imaginary, or the fear of life without illusions), and Albee's play can clearly stand on its own.

Two other techniques, close relatives to allusion and parody, are *montage* and *collage*.¹⁰⁷ The technique of montage involves the placing together, often side by side, of contrasting scenes or pieces of dialogue that seem to be taken from different sources, such as another play, or film, or even from another part of the same play. It can create a chaotic feeling, express the narrator's or character's mental state, or highlight the contrasts between two elements. This technique seems to be a favourite with Edward Albee. His *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung* is used as an example of montage by Hutchinson:

...there are initially three "parts," three characters talking on unrelated subjects and without any reference to each other. In an interview Albee has explained that he wrote the part for each character separately and then, in order to experiment in what he felt to be a "musical structure" with form and counterpoint, he broke the continuity of each separate part by presenting it in fragmented form. Half-way through the play another (unseen) character joins the sequence.¹⁰⁸

Collage differs from montage simply in the source of the material used, once collage employs material from an external source, i. e. real life.

Examples of both techniques can easily be found in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, most notably in Martha and George's parallel speeches. Martha is describing her son and his childhood, and George interposes his "Dies

¹⁰⁷ The difference is to be found in the material of *collage*, which is always from non-literary sources, but I will tend to use both indistinctly.

¹⁰⁸ HUTCHINSON, Peter. *Games Authors Play*. (London : Methuen, 1983). p. 70.

Irae” sentences in latin, first gradually, and later forming a counterplay of two voices as in music:

Martha: ... beautiful, beautiful boy.

George: Absolve, Domine, animas omnium fidelium defunctorum ab omni vinculo delictorum.

Martha: ... and school... and summer camp... and sledding... and swimming....

George: Et gratia tua illis succurrente, mereantur evadere iudicium ultionis. (p. 220-21)

(both together)

Martha:

I have tried, oh God I have tried; the one thing... the one thing I've tried to carry pure and unscathed through the sewer of this marriage; through the sick nights, and the pathetic, stupid days, through the derision and the laughter... God, the laughter, through one failure after another, one failure compounding another failure, each attempt more sickening, more numbing than the one before; the one thing, the one person I have tried to protect, to raise above the mire of this vile, crushing marriage; the one light in all this hopeless... darkness... OUR SON.

George:

Libera me, Domine, de morte aeterna, in die illa tremenda: Quando caeli movendi sunt et terra: Dum veneris iudicare saeculum per ignem. Tremens factus sum ego, et timeo, dum discussio venerit, atque ventura ira. Quando caeli movendi sunt et terra. Dies illa, dies irae, calamitatis et miseriae; dies magna et amara valde. Dum veneris iudicare saeculum per ignem. *Requiem* aeternam dona eis, Domine: et lux perpetua luceat eis. Libera me Domine de morte aeterna in die illa tremenda: quando caeli movendi sunt et terra; Dum veneris iudicare saeculum per ignem.

(end together) (p. 227)

The collage technique illustrated above had already been used, however, on page 85, where George sings “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf” to cover and “drown” Martha’s attack on him. In both cases, the collage consists of segments of different nature; first ordinary language is contrasted to song, later a *requiem* mass is opposed to a confessional speech. The former is revealing as an escapist

strategy, whereas the latter adds a ritualistic tone to the scene and prepares for the “tragic” outcome of the discussion. In addition to that, George’s act of exorcism of the belief in the myth of the son, performed on Martha, constitutes the collage of lines from exorcism treaties: “(with a hand sign) Kyrie, eleison. Christie, eleison. Kyrie, eleison” (p. 228). The effect created through this almost musical arrangement is that of a ritual. The exorcism of Martha of her fantasies is a crucial thematic event, which is shown by the title of the last Act—originally the title of the play—and the audience is allowed to perceive at the same time the object of exorcism, that is the whole myth she has woven around her imaginary son, and the performance of the ritual. The details of this ritualistic phenomenon will be discussed in Chapter V, in connection with an analysis of the significance of the mythical child.

On pages 38 and 39, we find examples of a slightly different form. Here, George and Nick would appear to take part in an ordinary dialogue, but their speeches do not match, and the effect suggests a random arrangement, scattered sentences about different topics thrown in together. This enhances the theme of the alienation between the characters, the failure of communication that isolates them in their own worlds:

George: ...How much do *you* weigh?
 Nick: I....
 George: Hundred and fifty-five, sixty... something like that? Do you play handball?
 Nick: Well, yes... no... I mean, not very well.
 George: Well, then... we shall play sometime. Martha is a hundred and eight... years *old*. She weighs somewhat more than that. How old is *your* wife?
 Nick: (*A little bewildered*) She’s twenty-six.
 George: Martha is a remarkable woman. I would imagine she weighs around a hundred and ten.
 Nick: Your... wife... weighs...?
 George: No, no, my boy. Yours! *Your* wife. My wife is Martha.
 Nick: Yes... I know.

George: If you were married to Martha you would know what it means...
(p.38-39)

Once more, the use of allusions and quotations contributes to this series of montages and marks the textual departures of the play. In that sense it further emphasizes the style of artifact of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, in opposition to a straight naturalistic rendering.

Apart from this complex of games in operation at textual level, considerable attention is drawn to language itself in the dialogue of the play. The extent of this awareness of the characters of their own words can be exemplified by reference to Martha's enthusiastic comment upon her own discourse in:

Martha: (*Consciously making rhymed speech*) Well, Georgie-boy had
lots of big ambitions
In spite of something funny in his past....
George: (*Quietly warning*) Martha....
Martha: Which Georgie-boy here turned into a novel....
His first attempt and also his last....
Hey! I rhymed! I rhymed! (p. 133)

Martha has turned *rhyme* into a playful device for her and her guests' amusement, but that, though the most obvious, is not the most important role played by their language games. More often, word play is revealing of the characters' self-awareness, of subtler shades of their relationship, or of the nature of language itself—all essential to the metatheatrical aspects of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* A case in hand is that of the series of imitations scattered throughout the text.

Imitation is another way of attracting attention to the utterance itself, i. e. to language, and in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* it acquires a further connotation of a metatheatrical nature. By that I mean that the imitation

highlights the use of another's voice by the character, which transforms them into "actors," following Aristotle's concept of the theatre as the "imitation of an action."¹⁰⁹ Actors playing characters playing actors playing characters—Uta Hagen playing Martha playing Bette Davis playing Rose—is a process that parallels the structure of the play-within-the-play and the two distinct audiences.

In the play, there are imitations of various sorts: of animals, of characters from other works, and of characters from the same play—when they imitate each other. Right on the first page, Martha tries to reproduce Bette Davis's performance of Rose in *Beyond the Forest*. George's "Oink! Oink!" just precedes Martha's imitation of a "tiny child" with "I'm firsty" (p. 16). George has his share of child talk: "birfday" and "a gweat big dwink," (p. 48) for instance—this relates specifically to an analysis of character, and that has been the object of our discussion in Chapter II. Another of his "performances" is that of an old flower seller, when he appears "in the doorway, the snapdragons covering his face; speaks in a hideously cracked falsetto" (p. 195) and enters the room as if it were a stage—the ironic detail being that it really is—and still another example is his rendition of a pep-talker: "but ya jest gotta buck up an' face 'em, 'at's all" (p. 97). As far as their imitations of each other are concerned, I can point out Honey's giggling as echoed by George: "Hee, hee, hee, hee" (p. 21). Nick also imitates his wife, as in : "Shhhhhh! nobody knows I'm here" (p. 187). And Honey, in turn, imitates George's "Nonsense" (p. 74).

In spite of its apparent simplicity, when compared with some of the other forms of word play, *repetition* also covers a wide range of different functions,

¹⁰⁹ Aristotle's "The Poetics." In: CLARK, B. H. *European Theories of the Drama*. (New York : Crown Publishers, 1965).

which can be exemplified in the play. First of all, it can be employed in a variety of ways to emphasize a point, as Martha demonstrates with her insistence on “Daddy said we should be nice to them” (p. 10), “I couldn’t agree with you more” (p. 53), or her “right at the meat of things” (p. 63-64). Secondly, it shows the lack of development in the dialogue, reflecting the failures of communication that happen between the individuals in the story. In that respect, it resembles nonsense and paradox. Third, repetition performs a structural function in the formation of the cumulative dialogue, in the form of a matrix of recurring themes; in other words, there is “the gradual build-up of action, the whole network of motifs, phrases, words repeated till they become keywords.”¹¹⁰ Consider, for example, how the notion of George’s inferiority and failure is built through the repetition of words and phrases such as “he is not the History Department [...] he is in the History Department,” (p. 50) “bog,” “flop,” “swampy,” etc.

In addition to that, repetition shows the character’s attempt to overcome the failures of communication caused by “noises” (as used by Roman Jakobson), either out of the alienation of the characters inner world, or the lack of attention, or still owing to meanings unrecovered by the characters. Martha and George’s exchange on page 8 is such a case:

Martha: (*Pouting*) Make me a drink.
 George: What?
 Martha: (*Still softly*) I said, make me a drink. (p. 8)

It is also noticeable that most of George’s repetitions are due to Nick’s inability to follow the former’s reasoning, as in the case of “musical beds” on

¹¹⁰ KENNEDY, A. *Dramatic Dialogue : the Duologue of Personal Encounter*. (New York : Cambridge University Press, 1983). p. 10.

page 34, or of “Parnassus,” page 30, or still of “good, better, best, bested,” page 32.

In many such instances, repetitions are graded up, so as to make the point more obvious; “people hesitate, repeat themselves, and go on hinting until their hints become explicit ... hints give way to subtler evasion or else to cruder attack.”¹¹¹ That reminds us of Martha’s hinting about “amusing” herself and Nick, which becomes more explicit with “necking with” (p. 170).

It should be kept in mind that the repeated item is also illustrative of intrinsic aspects of language in that each time the word (or phrase) is repeated, however identically, its sense is altered by the immediate context. Even when the repetitions occur in a row, there is in each of them the added sense of reiteration, confirmation, etc.; in other words, the repetitions work as comments on the first (or on the previous) occurrence. A case in point is that of the song “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?” It is first sang by Martha to try to cheer up her husband; then she sings it again to amuse her guests, but this time it also comments on George’s bad mood in his reaction to the funny song, as compared to their guests’. When it is sung for the third time, now by George, it has a distracting function; precisely the opposite occurs when he sings it as he enters the room in Act II. The play closes with its rendition as a sort of lullaby, to soothe Martha’s pain.

Repetitions also call attention to the rhythmic patterning of the dialogue. In her study of rhythm in drama, Kathleen George¹¹² shows how the repeated words in the opening scene of Albee’s *A Delicate Balance* establish an offbeat rhythm that relates them to each other and give coherence to the dialogue as if it

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

¹¹² GEORGE, Kathleen. *Rhythm in Drama*. (Pittsburgh : University of Pittsburgh Press, 1980). p. 36-41.

were a single, long monologue for the development of the themes of madness and drunkenness. A similar pattern is observable in the opening scene of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* By isolating the repeated items in the first four pages we have: cluck—cluck—late—you know—late—what a dump—what's that from—what a dump—I know—what's it from—you know—what's it from—what's what from—I just—I just—what a dump—what's that from—some goddamn—some goddamn—Warner Brothers epic—remember—remember—Warner Brothers epic—peritonitis—somebody—somebody—actor—scar—dressing table—actor—scar—name—name—picture—name—picture—dressing table—peritonitis—Chicago—Chicago—picture—Chicago—don't you know anything—Chicago—don't you know anything—picture—grocery store—grocery store—groceries—modest—modest—modest—married—married—groceries—what a dump—oh—oh. The effect is that of reproducing in speech the routine of everyday life, thus reflecting Martha's discontent and the obvious patterning of their relationship as a vicious circle.

Not only the repetition of words or phrases, but also the repetition of patterns features in the play. Here the effect is the enchantment typical of the ritualistic nature of contemporary drama. Consider, for example, how the whole series of exchanges that constitute the "Bringing Up Baby" scene follows a pattern not unlike that of liturgical recitation, with alternate complementary voices.

Still a last word on repetition goes for the end of the play. After all the battles have been fought, everything has been said and done, language seems to have been exhausted, the characters have run out of words, sentences are void of energy, so that dialogue is reduced to an exchange of monosyllables and alternate utterances of "yes" and "no." Their repetition emphasizes their

emptiness. As words gradually lose sense, uncertainty and paradox settle in. Consider the following excerpt:

George: (*Long silence*) It will be better.
 Martha: (*Long silence*) I don't... know.
 George: It will be... maybe.
 Martha: I'm... not... sure.
 George: No.
 Martha: Just... us?
 George: Yes.
 Martha: I don't suppose, maybe, we could....
 George: No, Martha.
 Martha: Yes. No.
 George: Are you all right?
 Martha: Yes. No. (p. 240-241)

Having just said that paradox is allowed to settle in, I now turn to those sophisticated forms of word game that defy the very possibility of communication. Ambiguity, paradox, puns, irony, nonsense, riddles, all subvert meaning, at the same time thematizing the limitations of language and exploring the terrain that lies beyond. Extensively employed by Albee—though not as persistently as in absurdist plays—these techniques acquire enormous significance to the interpretation of the play, as the examples below will demonstrate.

As frequent in the play as any other form of word play, *puns* go beyond the most immediate function of amusing or making the audience laugh; as it happens, not even the intrafictional audience (Nick and Honey) laughs at the puns, sometimes out of missing the point, and showing in some instances a certain contempt for them.

One example is the moment when George comments on what the president of the college expects from the professors:

Martha's father expects his... staff... to cling to the walls of this place, like the ivy... to come here and grow old... *to fall in the line of service*. One man, a professor of Latin and Elocution, *actually fell in the cafeteria line*, one lunch. He was buried, as many of us have been, and as many more of us will be, under the shrubbery around the chapel. (p. 41, emphasis added)

According to a dictionary definition, "if a person in an organization falls in line, they start to follow the rules and behave according to expected standards of behaviour."¹¹³ But George sarcastically changes the meaning by taking the expression literally, in the second line. The same occurs later with "up to." Martha says, "I see what you're up to, you lousy little..." to which George replies, "I'm up to page a hundred and..." (p. 171). Also, when George says, on page 71, that Martha is changing, he means changing her style, her behaviour, as well as her clothes.

Another pun, played as much by Martha as by the implied author himself on the spectator, is that of Martha's "conceive." In "I wouldn't conceive with anyone but you..." (p. 71), the term can mean either "become pregnant" or "invent, imagine," although the relevance of the second meaning only becomes clear later.

Even though the following examples of cliché reversals are not technically puns,¹¹⁴ they share the characteristic addition of a second layer of meaning. Consider, for instance, the passage in which George tells Nick that "musical beds is the faculty sport" (p. 34). The creative replacement of "beds" for "chairs" is revealing in relation to the sexual habits, the promiscuousness of the local society. Another such instance is "that is blood under the bridge" (p. 141) instead of "that is water under the bridge."

¹¹³ *Cambridge International Dictionary of English*. (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1995).

¹¹⁴ "Pun=an amusing use of a word or phrase which has several meanings or which sounds like another word" and therefore involves homonyms, homophones or homographs. *Ibid.*

More important than that, the use of puns as exemplified above has an essential structural function, for they symbolize the two layers of meaning of the play as a whole, the play-inside-the play, and the undecided instance of the imaginary son.¹¹⁵ As stated by Hutchinson: “The pun brings in another level (or levels) of meaning to a text, and an author may exploit this second level on a single occasion, on several, separate occasions, or continually. Puns, employed in a sustained and intricate manner, will allow him to narrate on several levels simultaneously.”¹¹⁶

So, “blood under the bridge,” rather than just a joke, stands for the battles that have been fought by Martha and George; “conceive” rings one sense to the intrafictional audience and another to the initiated public who recognizes its implications. Along with those examples, we see that “bring it up” also works at both levels at once, as a “double” pun: first it is a pun for the two meanings of “bring up” (“to care for” and “to talk about”); secondly because of “it” applying simultaneously to “topic” and “son”—once the child is imaginary, it can be referred to as “it.”

Double entendres are very similar to puns in that there are two meanings attributable to a single word or phrase, only in the former the secondary sense is a sexual one. This is the field Martha relishes, since it involves sexual connotations, and she becomes increasingly attached to it as the play develops. From “... you never know when it’s going to come in handy” (p. 53), she moves on to “you don’t need any props... No fake Jap gun” (p. 61), “you are right at the meat of things” (p. 63), “let’s get to know each other a little bit ... C’mon... make an experiment... make a little experiment. Experiment on old Martha” (p.

¹¹⁵ See Chapter V for more detail.

¹¹⁶ HUTCHINSON, Peter. *Games Authors Play*. (London : Methuen, 1983). p. 106.

164), or “I’m entertaining” (p. 170). They are essential both for the characterization of Martha and for the representation of the duality of the levels in the play reflected in the indirection of language. In other words, the authors’ intention is never as simple as it seems; underneath the superficial realism of the scenes, there is a game being played on the unsuspecting reader/spectator, just as Martha moves on the seduction of Nick go unnoticed by Honey—although there are indications that she actually “pretends” not to see their moves, the same way she escapes from reality in liquor and childish behaviour; a fact which does not go unheeded by George: “It’s just some things you can’t remember... hunh?” (p. 211).

Closely related to puns and double entendres, *ambiguity* also covers many of their functions, including the structural one mentioned before—speaking more specifically, all three illustrate the presence of two interconnected levels of meaning in the play. In some instances the ambiguity is only a potential one, because the context defines the choice of one of the senses. On other occasions, however, there remains the element of undecidability; when Martha mentions that she would never conceive with anyone but her husband, we are not sure that she is fully aware of both meanings of “conceive,” or if she means it in earnest, in which case the pun is the author’s alone. On the same page, 71, ambiguity is made even more explicit, as Martha states that “George talks disparagingly about the little bugger because... well, because he has problems”:

- George: The little bugger has problems? What problems has the little bugger got?
 Martha: Not the little bugger... stop calling him that! You! You’ve got problems. (p. 71)

The ambiguous language also reflects undecidability in the structure of the play. Were there other nights as this one? Has Martha told any other guests

about the kid? Did George really kill his parents? Was there ever a stepmother? Does the end of the play mean reconciliation? If so, will it last?

Inadequacy, paradox and oxymoron emerge in the play to probe the limits of reasoning and expression. Logic is defied by sequences like the one in which George states, “I won’t tell you” and then proceeds to tell what happened to the boy: “The following summer, on a country road, with his learner’s permit in his pocket and his father on the front seat to his right, he swerved the car, to avoid a porcupine, and drove straight into a large tree” (p. 95).

A statement like “Well, I’m glad you don’t believe me” (p. 111) is also paradoxical, since one is usually glad when others *believe* them. An instance of a series of oxymorons can be found on page 22, where George describes a painting as having “a quiet intensity,” then “a certain noisy relaxed quality,” (p. 22) and finally as “a quietly noisy relaxed intensity” (p. 22)—where the terms are incompatible because they contradict or cancel each other. “Blond-eyed” (p. 72) is an inappropriate combination. Inadequacy also surrounds Martha’s calling George an “old floozie,” so that Honey protests, “he’s not a floozie... he can’t be a floozie... you’re a floozie” (p. 74), for a floozie is “a young woman who intentionally wears the type of clothes and make-up that attract sexual attention in a way that is too obvious.”¹¹⁷

Nevertheless, two other occasions provide better examples. First as part of Martha’s “monologue,” in sentences like: “[George] who can make me happy and I do not wish to be happy, and yes I do wish to be happy,” or “... who tolerates, which is intolerable; who is kind, which is cruel; who understands,

¹¹⁷ *Cambridge International Dictionary of English*. (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1995).

which is beyond comprehension....” (p. 191). Next, we find paradox in some of Martha’s last speeches:

Martha: I don’t suppose, maybe, we could....
 George: No, Martha.
 Martha: Yes. No.
 George: Are you all right?
 Martha: Yes. No. (p. 241)

All of these forms verge on the nonsensical, and sheer *nonsense* itself may be called to play a role in the ludic use of language we have been surveying, although in many cases nonsense is only superficial and some “sense” might be “squeezed” from it under proper scrutiny—for the mind struggles desperately to overcome nonsense, like matter is sucked into the vacuum of a black hole in space. For instance, our analysis found a plethora of sense in the title “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?” which Harold Lampion calls a nonsense phrase, “a little reminiscent of the single-sentence irrational problems of Zen Buddhism.”¹¹⁸ That comment paves the way for our discussion of other instances in the play where logic and coherence seem to have been subverted or abandoned altogether.

In Act I, Nick tries to lead George into small talk, but when he asks how long George has been at the university, the following sequence develops:

Nick: You... you’ve been here quite a long time, haven’t you?
 George: (*Absently, as if he had not heard*) What? Oh... yes. Ever since I married... uh, What’s-her-name... uh, Martha. Even before that. (*Pause*) Forever. (*To himself*) Dashed hopes, and good intentions. Good, better, best, bested. (*Back to Nick*) How do you like that for a declension, young man? Eh?
 Nick: Sir, I’m sorry if we....
 George: (*With an edge in his voice*) You didn’t answer my question.
 Nick: Sir?

¹¹⁸ LAMPION, Harold. “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?” In: GASSNER, J., (Ed.) *Best American Plays : Fifth Series 1957-1963* (New York : Crown, 1973). p. 146-7.

George: Don't you condescend to me! (*Toying with him*) I asked you how you liked that for a declension: Good; better; best; bested. Hm? Well? (p. 32)

Here nonsense attacks on two fronts at once: there is a threat to the "normal" use of language in both George's "declension" and in its unexpectedness in the circumstance of ordinary conversation. Another instance is the exchange:

Nick : (*With some irritation*) I'm sorry.
 George: Hm? Oh. No, no... I'm sorry.
 Nick: No... it's... it's all right.
 George: No... you go ahead.
 Nick: No... please.
 George: I insist... You're a guest. You go first.
 Nick: Well, it seems a little silly... now.
 George: Nonsense! (p. 104)

Similarly, George states that he is "a Doctor. A.B.... M.A.... PH.D.... ABMAPHID! Abmaphid has been variously described as a wasting disease of the frontal lobes, and as a wonder drug. It is actually both" (p. 37). His description of his son as "blond-eyed" and "blue-haired" is another clear example that parallels that of Honey as a "wifey little... mouse" (p. 142).

On some occasions, semi-nonsensical exchanges take hold of the conversation, going to considerable length. After all the tension involved in the previous scene of conflict, George and Martha produce the following sequence on pages 197-99:

George: And here I went out into the moonlight to pick 'em for Martha tonight, and for our sonny-boy tomorrow, for his birfday.
 Martha: (*Passing on information*) There is no moon now. I saw it go down from the bedroom.
 George: (*Feigned glee*) From the bedroom! (*Normal tone*) Well, there was a moon.
 Martha: (*Too patitent; laughing a little*) There couldn't have been a moon.

George: Well, there was. There is.
 Martha: There is no moon; the moon went down.
 George: There is a moon; the moon is up.
 Martha: (*Straining to keep civil*) I'm afraid you're mistaken.
 George: (*Too cheerful*) No; no.
 Martha: (*Between her teeth*) There is no goddamn moon.
 George: My dear Martha... I did not pick sanpdragons in the stony dark. I did not go stumbling around Daddy's greenhouse in the pitch.
 Martha: Yes... you did. You would.
 George: Martha, I do not pick flowers in the blink. I have never robbed a hothouse without there is a light from heaven.
 Martha: (*With finality*) There is no moon; the moon went down.
 George: (*With great logic*) That may very well be, Chastity; the moon may very well have gone down... but it came back up.
 Martha: The moon does not come back up; when the moon has gone down it stays down.
 George: (*Getting a little ugly*) You don't know anything. IF the moon went down, then it came back up.
 Martha: BULL!
 George: Ignorance! Such... ignorance.
 Martha: Watch who you're calling ignorant!
 George: Once... once, when I was sailing past Majorca, drinking on deck with a correspondent who was talking about Roosevelt, the moon went down, thought about it for a little... considered it, you know what I mean?... and then, POP, came up again. Just like that. (p.197-199)

Nonsensical reversals also mark certain scenes for their incongruence. Consider how Honey, instead of acting as peacemaker as we would expect any ordinary person to do when physical attack breaks out, calls for "VIOLENCE! VIOLENCE!" (p. 135, 137). After George has told Nick his story, in Act II, he comments: "Well, I'm glad you don't believe me..." (p. 111).

These examples match in their variety the following classification:

- senseless accumulation of words or concepts;
- lack of logic in development of thought or action (*non sequitur*);
- conscious expression of trivialities;
- consciously false use of words;

- neologisms which lack denotative sense.¹¹⁹

But closer analysis of the examples above prove that there is, in most cases, some “sense” to be found, so that the difference between “usual” and “nonsensical” becomes one of degree, rather than type. As Hutchinson puts it:

the “norm” is the starting point: nonsense hinges on our conception of “common sense”. [...] Most so-called nonsense writing lies on the boundary between sense and non-sense, with the glimpse of a potential meaning acting as a challenge to the reader to make sense from words, phrases or sentences, which are at first sight incomprehensible.¹²⁰

As the analysis of the title of the play in Chapter III demonstrates, there is much more sense to “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?” than Mr Lampport was led to believe.

Instead of nonsense, Albee’s title challenges the mind in the form of a *riddle*. In Nick’s view, George appears to be talking in riddles all the time. When the former asks if the hosts have any children, George offers a riddle in response: “That’s for me to know and you to find out” (p. 39). But the first—and most important—riddle is posed not to the guests, but to the reader/viewer, in the form of the title echoed in the song “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?” which is only fully answered in the final lines of the play. Next, there is Martha’s “What’s that from?” Other instances follow, some being subtler than others. When George replies to Nick’s comment that Martha had never mentioned a stepmother, by saying that “maybe it isn’t true,” he makes a riddle of his reliability as a narrator.

Whereas some of the riddles find a solution in the action or speech of the characters, others are never given an answer in the play, an example being that

¹¹⁹ HUTCHINSON, P. *Games Authors Play*. (London : Methuen, 1983). p. 84.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

of the allusion to Bette Davis's film in Act I, for the title sought for Martha is never mentioned—although “forest sounds” on page 100 might work as a reminder to the audience. So, in a nutshell, riddles are also indexes of the nature of the play/text, which can be said to constitute an immensely complex riddle proposed as a challenge to the audience.

The game played on words also affects the *names* of the characters. There has been some controversy concerning the idea that the protagonists' names derive from George and Martha Washington as the archetypical American couple. Such notion does seem to match the symbolic dimension of the “all-American boy” the couple dreams of; the death of the son symbolizing the death (or failure) of the “American Dream.”

Nevertheless, it is important to remember that the characters are not given surnames, which detracts from individuality in favour of higher representativeness. Albee's criticism of American society in general profits from this lack of complete definition in names, which thus remain symbolic. Nick and Honey, for instance, are “flatter” characters—less developed than the protagonists—and that is reflected in their receiving only nicknames. Besides that, Martha and George's son is never given a name in the play—only a nickname, “sonny-Jim” (p. 196), which is not employed consistently—and called alternately “the bit,” “the kid,” “the apple of our eyes,” “sonny,” “our son,” “the little bugger.” Being an imaginary character, this lack of a name proper is only fitting. Consequently, the three sorts of names employed by the author also confirm the three levels of characters present in the play: full-fledged characters, types, and the illusory character invented and mentioned by the others.

These ironically named characters, Martha and George, are the masters at playing games with words. They actually use their language as a weapon against each other, and nowhere is this clearer than in the phenomenon of their *swearing contest*. Although swearing is common practice in the play, mainly related to Martha, one scene stands out for the alternate exchange of swearwords between Martha and George:

George: Monstre!
 Martha: Cochon!
 George: Bête!
 Martha: Canaille!
 George: Putain! (p. 101)

This seems reminiscent of the sort of swearing contests of a certain ritualistic nature, mentioned by Huizinga,¹²¹ for instance, as common to many societies in Ancient History and the Middle Ages. Besides that, it calls to mind two phenomena preserved in contemporary Afro-American communities, called “playing the Dozens” and “Signifyin(g).”¹²² Playing the Dozens involves attacking a competitor’s pride by means of verbal offense—in the form of a rhymed stanza—against his mother, to which he responds similarly in turn, and so on, alternately. Signifyin(g) [sic], on the other hand, in spite of a similar structure, has its difference in the fact that the contestants’ swearing is aimed at each other, rather than at the opponent’s mother.

George and Martha’s competition, akin to Signifyin(g), is part of the overall verbal battle for power that characterizes their relationship.

¹²¹ HUIZINGA, J. *Homo Ludens : o Jôgo como Elemento da Cultura*. Trad. João Paulo Monteiro. (São Paulo : Perspectiva, 1971)..

¹²² GATES Jr, H. L. *The Signifying Monkey : a Theory of African-American Literay Criticism*. (New York : Oxford University Press). p. 73.

Nevertheless, in their games, the defeat of the opponent also means a personal failure, or self-destruction, which leads Nick to remark, in this sequence:

George: (*Shrugging*) Well, that's the way it was... you were always coming at him. I thought it was very embarrassing.

Nick: If you thought it was so embarrassing, what are you talking about it for? (p. 121)

We might still consider the way George's "killing" of his son constitutes a loss for him too. This behaviour once more reminds us of Huizinga's *Homo Ludens*, where he describes ritualistic competitions like the "potlatch," in which the competitors prove their capacity and power by destroying their own possessions, the winner being he who can afford to lose the most. George's sacrifice amounts to a statement to the effect that "I can do without it, Martha, now can you?" In short, the swearing contest could work as a model of the general structural pattern of the play, in which George and Martha alternately attack each other in increasing levels of anger and psychological destructiveness until the final move, that tips the balance completely and calls for the end of the play, when there is nothing left to be either gained or lost.

The irony of "winner loses all" shows that *irony* is not only present in the dialogue, but also in the whole structuration of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Irony is a complex phenomenon, with many types and variations. An effective and encompassing definition, however, reads as follows: "Irony is a statement, or presentation of an action or situation, in which the real or intended meaning conveyed to the initiated intentionally diverges from, and is incongruous with, the apparent or pretended meaning presented to the uninitiated."¹²³

¹²³ GREEN, D. H. *Irony in the Medieval Romance*. ([S.l.] : Cambridge, 1979). p. 9.

As long as the actual audience focuses the point of view of the intrafictional audience, it will be the victim of irony like Honey and Nick are. From the moment it comes to an understanding of the game that is being played by George and Martha on their guests, the actual audience will then shift to a coincidence with the authorial audience,¹²⁴ and therefore share the secret and the irony of the “kid.” So, the viewer will identify the play within the play, see Martha and George less in the role of characters and more as performers, actors and authors. The hosts’ performance is ironic towards the intrafictional audience, and now the viewer joins them in their irony, becomes collusive, moving from victim to victimizer of irony. By recognizing the signs left by the author as to the “real” meaning behind the text, the audience attains “a sense of complicity” with the author.

The reversals in the roles played by the characters are also ironic, as observed initially above in “Guns and fame,” because their expectations and views of themselves are contradicted by the circumstances. In Act III, Nick becomes Martha’s houseboy, just like George had been in Act I, and it is his turn to open the door; and this time round Nick is the “flop.” Similarly, George’s begging for Martha’s silence about his secrets and her and Nick’s merciless unveiling of them find an inverted reflex, first in Nick’s begging to George not to go on with his narration of “Get the Guests,” and later in Martha’s pleading with him not to kill their “son.”

Albee’s use of irony in the dialogue of the play is, besides, a reflex of a more general belief in the irony of human condition, typical of absurdist drama, and there is a point for the consideration of the absurd in the characters’ situation in the play. Irony is also present in the sense that the author,

¹²⁴ For the different types of audience, see Chapter V.

throughout the work, pretends to offer for the appreciation of the audience a naturalistic style, when this in fact conceals other levels of meaning that point towards traditions as varied as the theatre of cruelty, epic theatre and the absurd.¹²⁵

4.6 Serious jokes

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? illustrates word play as a complex and varied range of resources for the playwright. A number of techniques have been inserted in the play, not merely for humorous effect, but rather to compose a structure of meanings in agreement with the recurrent themes, and most of the time reinforced and expanded them. In fact, humour is hardly the case of the games played, which is in accordance with Gottfried's criticism, although he sees it as a failure, whereas I see it as an achievement. The function of the word game is another. Phenomena such as allusion, irony, montage, ambiguity, imitation and puns reverberate the duplicity of levels inherent in the play. They operate on a semic strand, taking part in the features that distinguish and define the characters and the relationship between them, as studied above. On the hermeneutic strand, they reveal hidden aspects of the intrafictional "reality" that contradict immediate appearances even as perceived by the characters themselves. We should remember that the guests in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* are offered about just as much information as the actual audience, but with a difference of keys of perception: what is seen by them as belonging to a frame of social conventions when entertaining guests in the college environment is viewed by the audience as part of a theatrical frame, in which

¹²⁵ This aspect will be expanded in the next chapter.

secrets, fictionalizing, madness, open conflict and deceiving might also compose the horizons of expectations. As this duality is formed, the word remains the sole connection between both levels. That is to say that the meaning of the events in the play—and of the words related to them—builds itself in the interval between two different worlds: the allusions, the puns, the montage, are meaningless outside this duplicity. When Nick realizes the “truth” about George and Martha’s son, he does so not through the perception of this meaning as revealed explicitly in the words—for the words did not say that much—but by probing the interval of words, at the unsaid.

The metatheatrical aspects of the play find an eloquent parallel in the use of language by the characters: the monologues, Martha and George’s dominance of speech over their guests, the style of self-awareness—reminiscent perhaps of O’Neill’s Tyrone—employed by George, as well as imitations, quotations, ritualistic behaviour, overt performance and narration, all have their say in this respect. From a more general viewpoint, however, the play with words in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* resume the concern with language and interpersonal communication present in earlier works like *The Zoo Story* and so precious to the “Zeitgeist” of our century. Nonsense, paradox, repetition, all of them defy and threaten to break down our trust in stable meanings and the possibility of communication. This is when the play comes closer to the works of the Theatre of the Absurd.

The “child made of words” phenomenon touches another deep chord in the contemporary perception of the relationship between language and reality. All that is hidden behind the elaborate narrative made by George and Martha about their son, including characteristics and upbringing, proves to be an endless regression of constructs. In a mythological style, signifier plays upon a signified

that is another signifier and so on, in turns, but they refer to an emptiness, an illusion. The centre of the text is never to be found. The meaning becomes the sign; it is not transmitted, it is not symbolized by it, it is *created* by it.¹²⁶

Throughout this process of revealing and concealing meaning, the playful side of the words is widely exploited. From resembling a game, language becomes a game, of utter complexity and seriousness, reaching an astonishing richness in the hands of the author. Faced with such a game, we feel like Honey and Nick before the moves their hosts make in their “verbal card playing,” less inclined to laugh than to stare in wonder.

¹²⁶ This point is further developed in the next chapter.

Chapter V

THE GAME OF THE UNREAL

The truth is the falsehood that permits
the human being to survive.

F. Nietzsche

5.1 The game of fictionality

Of all the objections raised against *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, the most tenacious opposition goes towards the device of the imaginary son. It would seem, to many critics, that the end of Act III is incoherent and spoils the play. After having made our point about several kinds of authorial games played by Albee in this work, we are now challenged with a game whose material is fictionality itself—the game of the unreal. To reach a greater understanding of the effect of this combination of “real” and “fictional”¹²⁷ elements inside the play, it is necessary to consider the various implications of the mythical child to the levels of structuration of the text, to the interplay of fictional/nonfictional worlds, to the social criticism proposed by the author, for it is the element that subverts the definitions and breaks away from a neat distinction of levels. But we must above all address its role in the effectiveness of the end of the play, which leads the discussion into the level of the convention employed versus convention perceived.

¹²⁷ Throughout the chapter, I will be using the term “fiction” not in the sense of literary prose, but in the sense of the product of imagination as opposed to the empirical reality. So, the term encompasses not only the theatrical, but any discourse (written or not, including conventionally nonfictional genres like journalism and biography) that could be said to be less than true. Now, this definition cannot help being vague in face of its application in the discussion of a work of art that purposefully undermines and “plays with” the distinction between reality and fiction. At the same time, and as a consequence, the term “metafiction” will denote any narcissistic form of fiction as explained above, being broader and easier to handle in different circumstances than “metatheatre.”

As an overall initial evaluation, we could observe that whereas there are works whose end brings about only a confirmation of the development of the predictions made, and merely conclude, this play has an ending which subverts the previous conceptions and certainties of the audience, and so forces the spectator to rethink, to reevaluate everything that had preceded it, and rework his conclusions, so that the play continues to exert its amazing power over the audience way beyond the final curtain call. It produces the sensations of excitement, illumination and fulfillment people go to the theatre for. Excitement is a key word in this case; it comes from the tension of opposites, the shift to a novel perception, like the emotion experienced by Nick and Honey in the scene of the fake gun, which is exciting because it is new, surprising. So it is with the device of the imaginary son, that brings a sudden and forceful change in the perception of the events in the play, which causes a shock of surprise, an intense dramatic effect.

The effect of the imaginary son, along with many other aspects of the play that bring the distinction between reality and illusion at the brink of collapse, is illustrative of the contemporary shift from a rhetoric of the real to a rhetoric of the unreal. That means that what was called empirical reality is questioned, for it "seems to have become more and more unreal, and what has long been regarded as unreal is more and more turned to or studied as the only 'true' or 'another and equally valid' reality."¹²⁸ The discourse that had the status of reality is now seen as just another fiction, which had been given a privileged position in the rank of discourses. This is how literary realism has come to be challenged by metafictional writers as being farther from "reality" than their own works. In other words, metafiction, by means of its mimesis of the

¹²⁸ BROOKE-ROSE, Christine. *A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in Narrative and Structure, Especially of the Fantastic*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983 [1981]). p. 4.

“process” of writing/rewriting, is truer than realism with its mimesis of the “product.”

In realism—and naturalism—the referent of the literary sign was the material world, the model to be recreated inside the play as naturally as possible by means of verisimilitude; in metafiction the referent is the literary sign itself, in an endless regression of reenactments, an infinite perspective of quotations from previous texts in permanent dialogue with the present work. But it is undeniable that the fictional world might be considered as constituting a “reality” by itself, with its own truth. Not one, but two, three, a plethora of “realities have to be accounted for.” So, our first step will be to set down a framework for the discussion of the several levels of reality that can be said to make up the play.

5.2 The many faces of reality

A especially tricky term to work with, “reality” becomes pivotal in our discussion of *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, with several distinct meanings, according to the point of view adopted, and this is where Rabinowitz’s classification¹²⁹ comes in handy. The advantage of his system lies in its practicality, for it shifts the discussion of the status of reality from a purely ontological perspective to an epistemological one, i. e., its perception as reality by the audience. This hermeneutic turn brings to light the role of the audience in giving meaning to the work of art, in agreement with the teachings of the reception theory. From the initial consideration that “all works of

¹²⁹ RABINOWITZ, P. J. “Truth in Fiction: a Reexamination of Audiences.” In: *Critical Inquiry*, 4 : 121-41, 1977.

representational art—including novels—are ‘imitations,’”¹³⁰ Rabinowitz proceeds to demonstrate that different “realities” are perceived by different “audiences,” which he numbers four, but provides for a range of combinatory possibilities. He lists the *actual audience*, which has a physical participation in the act of reading or viewing; the *authorial audience*, the specific hypothetical audience the author is addressing; the *narrative audience*,¹³¹ the one the narrator is narrating to, the imaginary people he addresses; and finally the *ideal narrative audience*, which believes the narrator, and is ideal from the narrator’s point of view. The distinction between each pair of levels will become clearer in the following examples from the play.

When we turn again to the play, considered as performance or presentation, there are not great difficulties involved in the identification of the actual audience. People take their seats at the theatre or the cinema to watch a session of a play by Edward Albee, or a film based on it. The authorial audience would then be formed by those among the actual audience who can fully appreciate the author’s work, who can follow his storyline, identify the allusions, understand his message. As for the narrative audience and ideal narrative audience, there seem to be none, once *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is a play, and therefore, lacks a narrator. But is it really as simple as that?

On the contrary, the combination of audiences in the play is extremely complex. The analysis made in the previous chapters, especially the last one,

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

¹³¹ The “narrative audience” and “ideal narrative audience” have been referred to, so far in this study, as “intrafictional audience,” now that the discussion leads us into finer distinctions, the terminology offered by Rabinowitz is employed with advantage. The former term will be resumed, however, in discussions of a more general nature.

will prove helpful here. Rabinowitz mentions that the narrator, either explicit or implicit, is an “imitation of an author” who writes for an “imitation audience (which we shall call the narrative audience) which also possesses particular knowledge.”¹³² As I pointed out in Chapter II, we can find implicit narrators in George and Martha, especially when George takes over the role of creator and master of ceremonies—I should remind my reader at this stage that offering statements about an event is not the only type of narration; Branigan demonstrates that narration also takes place as a process “when an actor/agent acts *on* or is acted upon” and when “a focalizer has an experience *of*”¹³³ the event. So we can say that the way the story is presented by the author, then by the director through the action of the characters, is a form of narration.

George and Martha as narrators (in their oral narratives as well as in their performance) address a specific audience: their guests. So it is Honey and Nick who constitute, or rather embody, the narrative audience (I have been referring to this level of audience as “intrafictional” throughout my analysis, but I make concessions here to Rabinowitz’s terminology). Well, the inclusion of characters on the stage who represent the narrative audience has the effect of focalizing¹³⁴ the action. In other words, the actual audience can identify with the narrative audience so as to perceive the events in the play through their eyes. The action is reflected upon the actual audience by the narrative audience. This narrative audience, however, as noted before, is also split into two, given

¹³² *Ibid.*, p.

¹³³ Such considerations belong to the chapter “Levels of Narration,” in Edward Branigan’s *Narrative Comprehension and Film* (London : Routledge, 1992).

¹³⁴ Once more, I am borrowing from the technical vocabulary adopted by Edward Branigan in *Narrative Comprehension and Film*. (London : Routledge, 1992).

the differences in perception between Honey and Nick, and we can believe in a corresponding division in the actual audience.

As for the authorial audience, we have already seen how many textual strategies are employed by Albee to the effect of leading (and misleading) his audience. We would then assume he has a particular sort of viewer in mind, one who can recognize his allusions and apprehend their significance, and who would then probably be able to solve the enigmas before Nick does.

The ideal narrative audience is closely related to the question of the unreliability of the narrator in a given narrative. This is the audience that “believes the narrator, accepts his judgements, sympathizes with his plight, laughs at his jokes even when they are bad” and “accepts uncritically what he has to say.”¹³⁵ In the works where the narrator is reliable, there is a complete coincidence of narrative and ideal narrative audiences, and nothing is left to say about the latter. Other narrators, however, work at two simultaneous levels, by presenting a narration directed at a specific audience (the ideal narrative audience), but which another audience (the narrative audience) recognizes as unreliable. A critical, ironic distance is created then between the two kinds of audience.

Honey’s role is interesting in this respect. Having said that the guests stand for the narrative audience in the play, we can take one step further by classifying the guests according to this new categorization, where Honey would fall on the ideal narrative audience side. Her naivety and drunkenness—aggravated by her escapism—prevent her from grasping the meaning and significance of events, so that she firmly believes the stories told by George and

¹³⁵ RABINOWITZ, P. J. “Truth in Fiction: a Reexamination of Audiences.” In: *Critical Inquiry*, 4: 121-41, 1977. p. 134.

in a dispute for power. What he fails to notice is that such dispute mirrors his own struggle to make quick progress in his career. But that perception is the function of another type of audience, the audience that has watched *Beyond the Forest*, that is familiar with the story of the *Three Little Pigs*, who can follow the author's clues and detect his irony, and which we call the authorial audience. From level zero to this third level of ironic detachment, or critical awareness, there is a range of possibilities of identification for the members of the only totally non-hypothetical audience, the actual audience.

Having said that much about the various audiences in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, I can use their level of "belief" and involvement to discuss the aspect of the "real" in the play. To the four kinds of audience correspond at least the same number of different "realities."

From the point of view of the ideal narrative audience, Martha and George's son is real. Consequently, Honey is moved by the story of "Bringing Up Baby" and sorry for his death. She does believe that Martha is crying for the same reason. What is a reality for Honey, on the other hand, constitutes fiction, a fantasy, for other characters. George knows that when he calls his son "the bit," and there is a play on words about Martha herself referring to him as "it":

Martha: I said never mind. I'm sorry I brought it up.
 George: Him up... not it. You brought him up. Well, more or less....
 Martha: I don't want to talk about it!
 George: (*falsely innocent*) But Martha....
 Martha: I DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT!
 George: I'll bet you don't. (*To Honey and Nick*) Martha does not want to talk about it... him. Martha is sorry she brought it up... him.
 (p. 70)

Similarly, Martha undermines this illusion in their quarrel about the colour of their son's eyes and hair, and by presenting versions of the child's

psychological conditions and upbringing contradictory to those given by George.

Nick only realises the full implications of these “slips” when he discovers that the “kid” is only a fantasy. But this awareness comes late in the play, very close to the end. The son is then no longer part of reality for him. But what is? The fact that he and his wife have been caught in a war waged by their hosts against each other. Yet, the full implications of his condition, the patterns and references of the play are beyond his grasp.

The authorial audience, in turn, has access to that information, and to much more. For them, Nick and Honey live an illusion as much as the hosts do, are bound to sink in the same shifting sands. From this audience’s point of view, in addition to that, Nick’s “reality” is another fiction, a performance on stage by four actors before the actual audience. The actors and the actual audience are part of a single reality, but the authorial audience—and the actual audience as well—sees the “kid” as a fiction created by characters that are fictional themselves.

This division of the audiences and their respective perceptions of reality resume the point when, in the previous chapters, I suggested that the actual audience—which went then by the name “extrafictional”—could take three distinct positions, according to whether it had a total perception, had a partial awareness, or was totally oblivious of the solution to the enigmas involved in the play. I could rephrase it to indicate an identification with the authorial, the narrative or the ideal narrative audience. But the imaginary son, in spite of constituting another distinct fictional level inside the play, paradoxically undermines this distinction and blurs the neat lines that have just been drawn to

classify the different realities of the text, and this is the direction in which our discussion proceeds.

5.3 Real tears for an imaginary corpse

If Martha belongs to the narrative audience level, and is therefore aware of the illusionary nature of the “kid,” why is it that she suffers so much because of his “death”? An obvious, comforting explanation is that the fantasy of having a child had nurtured her self-esteem for so long that she could not let go of it that easily, especially in the case of a character who is at the brink of mental breakdown. But for our purposes, it is more important to consider that question from another point of view.

Through Martha’s attitude towards her imaginary child, we catch a glimpse of the special status of literary “reality” itself. Martha’s son is less than real, but more than merely a lie. The child seems to hang between both worlds so as to become almost as palpable a character as any of the others on the stage. It has gained for itself a haunting presence in the lives of the characters as well as in the perception of the actual audience. And just as Martha cries because of the “death” of someone who does not belong to her level of “reality,” the actual audience of the play experiences, vicariously, the joy and pain of the two couples on the stage, i. e. also feels sorry for a situation it knows is not “real” in the sense of belonging to the same level of existence as their physical bodies.

Commenting on the same condition of the work of art, Rabinowitz makes the point very clearly:

... the aesthetic experience of such works [a painting, or a tale] exists on two levels at once. We can treat the work neither as what it is nor as what it appears to be; we must be aware simultaneously of both aspects. A viewer is hardly responding appropriately to Othello if he rushes on the stage to

protect Desdemona from the Moor's wrath; nor is the reader of the Sherlock Holmes stories who treats his idol as a historical being, makes pilgrimages to his home on Baker Street, and uses weather reports to determine when certain stories "actually" took place. Neither, however, is it proper to refuse to mourn Desdemona simply because we know that she will soon rise, return to her dressing room, remove her makeup, and go out for a beer with Roderigo. Similarly, anyone who argues that Holmes is simply a fiction, and thus refuses to fear for his safety as he battles Moriarty, is missing the point of the whole experience. ... In the proper reading of a novel, then, events which are portrayed must be treated as both "true" and "untrue" at the same time.¹³⁶

Thus we are reminded of the existence of real toads in the imaginary garden of art, to speak with the poet,¹³⁷ by this unseen child that inhabits two fictional worlds at the same time, as active and crucial in the development of the play and the environment of George and Martha's living room as Hamlet the Senior's ghost in Elsinore. What we witness in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* amounts to a frame break by Martha. The whole classification we have established becomes shaky because of the undecidability of one element. Similar to George's frame break of the theatrical space and imitation of an author, and the splitting of the play into two, as studied in Chapter II and Chapter IV above, this represents the play's awareness of itself as an artifact, but one of a peculiar quality. Attention is drawn to the layers interposed between the "armchair world" and the world(s) inside the work of art. The play defies a single-layer, "realistic" portrayal in favour of a subtle metatheatrical mutiny.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

¹³⁷ "Poetry" by Marianne Moore. In: *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*. 3. Ed. (New York : W. W. Norton & Company, 1983). p. 590.

5.4 Building a Bond

The question of the originality of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* has been raised by many a critic. Some simply acknowledge its indebtedness to Strindberg's *The Bond*, whereas others claim it is but a poor imitation. This last charge sounds strange in times when the term parody has become so much used, and certainly abused, and reminds us of similar criticism against Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*,¹³⁸ only four years later.

Many characteristics can be found in common between Albee's and Strindberg's plays. In both, an apparently respectable couple exchange increasingly aggressive accusations before third parties, trying to humiliate each other publicly in order to gain the rights over their only child, not present onstage. References to personal failures, unfaithfulness and selfishness are used as weapons with such violence that in the end both parents lose the child they fought so much for. This final irony gives the tone to both plays, and the last scene brings some sort of communion, or sympathy, in loss and suffering. The relationship between the plays is less one of plagiarism than that of parody. As Hucheson points out, parody is "repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity."¹³⁹ In *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* that basic arrangement found in the nineteenth-century text is relocated, transformed, and recreated. The new trans-contextualization includes a more private setting, a substitution of guests for the audience and jury in the court, the effect of drunkenness, the involvement of the audience in the conflict. This

¹³⁸ For details, see LEÃO, Liana de Camargo. *Metavisions : Entrances and Exits in Tom Stoppard's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. MA Thesis, Universidade Federal do Paraná. (Curitiba : 1994).

¹³⁹ HUTCHEON, Linda. *A Theory of Parody. The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*. (London : Methuen, 1985). p. 6.

last alteration is very important, once it adds another dimension to the play, as we have seen. Another point that dispels the idea of mere imitation is the change in tone, which is a very distinctive feature of parodic re-creation. Strindberg gives his play a very serious treatment throughout, making irony his sole concession to some form of humour. Albee, on the other hand, creates internal ironic shades, employs word play and humourous language and builds dark comedy out of the characters' crisis. Besides that, if Albee's play is a parody of *The Bond*—and less of a parody than Stoppard's work, to use the same example—it is also at least pseudo-parodic in relation to other texts, such as the film *Beyond the Forest*, the play *A Long Day's Journey Into Night* and the story of the three little pigs. The elements from these sources, identified further above, qualify and distort those borrowed from Strindberg, so that the play becomes more and more opaque to the text of *The Bond*, which in turn fades farther away into the background.

Still more important to the purposes of the current investigation, in Albee we find a level of self-reflexivity totally alien to Strindberg's play. Martha and George are aware of their condition as performers, they make references to their own (and to each other's) styles, play games with their audience, and, most of all, create their own fiction. Let us now turn to this last aspect to consider its consequences.

Like the couple in *The Bond*, George and Martha openly offend each other; like them, the hosts fight for their only child before an audience of witnesses and judges. What has changed is time: seventy years lie between the two plays, and the world has changed. Albee shows us that we are living a new era, without room for certainties. We are reminded that at such times of relativity and doubt, nothing can be taken for granted. The child in Strindberg's play is

never present on the stage, yet its existence is never questioned, for the audience is sure the child is somewhere behind the backdrop (in the dressing room, perhaps). So it had to be believed in the naturalistic tradition; the play was the depiction of a world like our own, we were witnesses to a “slice” of life of people like us. We could suffer with them, and laugh along with them. In other words, the work of art had a referent in the real world. In *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, however, the theatre is nothing but the theatre; what is beyond the stage is not a continuation of life onstage, but a void—the absent child is a nonexistent child. In 1892, people could not believe a couple would be fighting for an illusion, and yet, they could just as well be. And yet, the same audience was ready to believe Hamlet would be willing to kill for the ghost of his father; but in our own age and time, some refuse to believe Martha would cry for an imaginary child she had nurtured for twenty-one years. Had the kid in Albee’s play been real, we would in fact be back in 1892, discussing *The Bond*, but as it is, we see the breach of convention that indeed marks the convention of our times. Jerry, in *The Zoo Story*, can only achieve communion with another human being by sacrificing himself. Martha and George can only fulfil their wish of a successful marriage through the illusion of a son. If “ironic inversion is a characteristic of all parody,”¹⁴⁰ then the imaginary son is the fulcrum upon which the trans-contextualization develops. Through it, *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* parodies the naturalism of *The Bond*. The joint creation by the couple replaces the real world reference. Instead of the verisimilitude proposed by Zola and exploited by Strindberg, the audience views a pageant of unnatural dialogue, clothed with self-conscious performance and crowned with a definite

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

challenge to plausibility—in the terms of realism—in the form of the imaginary son.

So we move from the consideration of the illusion of reality to the reality of an illusion, a reversal with profound implications for our understanding of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Roman Ingarden¹⁴¹ claims that every alteration in the behaviour of a character or in the course of events aiming at producing an effect upon the spectator is felt as an “artifice,” a lack of naturalness. This is precisely what we observe in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*: the imitations of other characters, exaggeration in dialogue and behaviour, the contradictions in the discourse of the characters all point to artifice and set the play away from naturalistic presentation of a closed scene. The acting and language are centrifugal, thus defying the limitations imposed by the naturalistic tradition.

The naturalistic convention implies a series of principles. There is a coincidence with—when not influence from—many of the scientific and cultural revolutions that took place in the nineteenth century: Comte's positivism, Darwin's theory of natural selection, Bernard's physiology, Marx's idea of economic man. All of these pointed towards a deterministic view of the condition and fate of man. So, the “realistic rebellion” claimed the use of a language that was at the same time plain and genuine to that employed in real life. The individuality of the characters had to be sacrificed for their representativeness of class, age, sex, economic group, always under the forces of heredity and environment. The objective rendition of lifelike setting,

¹⁴¹ INGARDEN, Roman. “As funções da linguagem teatral.” In: NUNES, Luiz Arthur, *et al.* (Org. e Trad.). *O Signo Teatral : a Semiologia Aplicada à Arte Dramática*. (Porto Alegre : Globo, 1977).

character and dialogue was a key factor in establishing a convincing illusion of reality—according to Zola, the representation of truth.

In *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* however, although the setting might resemble a lifelike room of a small college community, how representative can we claim it to be? Similarly, how representative are the characters involved in the play? The acting, at least, has elements that deny, or rather corrupt, its representativeness as natural behaviour; all we need is to remember all the instances of exaggeration, imitation, of the uncommon, especially in relation to the games played. Yet, it is the major component of the naturalistic creed, the one upon the other elements are based, the dramatic dialogue itself, that is constantly subverted, by all the games illustrated in the previous chapter. The self-consciousness of the characters' actions and language is certainly opposed to naturalism.

This brings us to consider the several influences that can be felt behind the apparent simplicity of the performance of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* I have already mentioned more than once that the dialogue of the play has a touch of the tradition of the absurd, and so do many other aspects of the relationship between the characters and the situations in which they are involved. Apart from that, elements reminiscent of the epic theatre can be found in the performance that asserts itself as such, thus maintaining an ironic distance between the events in the play and the public, so that emotional involvement is not constant. Paradoxically as it may seem, alongside these elements we find others suggestive of influences from the theatre of cruelty. The audience is drawn into participation through the ritualistic devices—repetitions, enchanting rhythm, latin, exorcism, coordinated recitement, etc.

So, the elements analysed in the preceding chapters indicate adherence not to a single convention neatly established as is the case naturalism, but suggest another tradition which in fact combines within itself the most varied influences: post-modernism. Post-modernism is essentially narcissistic (self-conscious), self-contradictory, double-sided, ironic, parodic, anti-authoritarian, subversive, suspicious of absolute truth. These characteristics are easily identifiable and relevant in the context of Albee's play. The parodies that broaden the scope of reference of the play have been studied in certain detail. We have also observed how self-conscious George and Martha's behaviour can be, as when they discuss their own "performance" for their guests, or the rules of their games. The narcissistic nature of their language was given plenty of attention, and several instances denote the self-contradictory side of the play, for example when George narrates to Nick something he had stated he would not tell, or when the characters contradict each other's version of the facts. When "truth" is achieved in the end, it comes as a contradiction of what had that far been held as "real," so that it only serves to cast a shadow of doubt back upon everything that was said or done; in other words, we are then left bereft of certainties as to earlier situations and affirmations about George's and Martha's past, about their relationship and state of mind. Most of all, as truth and lie become virtually undistinguishable on the whole the same way the frames of "reality" collapse, the suggestion is that there is no absolute truth left to the dramatic text, it empties itself of a definite meaning, except of the meaning that it "is."

Rather than a representative of naturalism in theatre, Albee's play might be seen then as a parody, not only of Strindberg's *The Bond*, but of the very tradition on which the latter is imbedded. In addition to the differences pointed

out before between the two plays, there is the fact that *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* often parodies through farcical exaggeration the “unnatural clichés of the naturalistic theatre.”¹⁴² Such clichés are attempts to make up for lost strategies that were abandoned for the sake of verisimilitude, and include, for instance, “tell-tale properties deposited about the stage.”¹⁴³ The painting included in the setting of George and Martha’s living room conforms to that function, and is dutifully highlighted by George’s comment on his wife’s state of mind. Another example is the parody of the inoffensive letter of naturalistic drama by the inclusion of the imaginary telegramme that would have been received by George. Strindberg stated that he sought to allow “dialogue to meander, or seem to do so, with one speaker engaging the mind of another as if by chance.”¹⁴⁴ This simingly natural flow of dialogue finds its opposite in Albee’s play, where the characters never seem to really engage each other’s minds. Martha’s monologue is also representative of a technique that was condemned at Strindberg’s time as unnatural. Naturalism also preached that no distracting element should break the illusion of the fourth wall, the closed scene—that is why Strindberg wrote mostly one-act plays, to prevent the intervals from disturbing the “suggestive influence of the author-hypnotist”¹⁴⁵—but George comments on the characters not present on the stage. Also, and this is very important, Albee parodies one of the defining characteristics of realistic portrayal, that of the profusion of detail. One of the

¹⁴² STYAN, J. L. *The Dark Comedy: the Development of Modern Comic Tragedy*. 2. Ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968). p. 56.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

¹⁴⁴ STYAN, J. L. *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice I: Realism and Naturalism*. 1. Paperback Ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). p. 41.

¹⁴⁵ STRINDBERG, August. “Author’s Foreword to *Miss Julie*.” In: CLARK, B. H. (Ed.) *European Theories of the Drama*. (New York: Crown, 1965). p.326.

emphasis of realism in literature has been to provide the audience with a level of detail that impressed the “truth” of the scene upon the senses. This intention is clear in Strindberg’s insistence that the kitchen where all the action of *Miss Julie* was to take place should be furnished with real props and equipment, instead of “painted shelves and cooking utensils.”¹⁴⁶ It is the imaginary child, however, that really subverts that convention. Notice how misleading the wealth of detailed information given by Martha and George in their narratives proved to be. In the case of their son, they build a whole picture of an ordinary childhood, including delivery, small incidents, physical description; and yet their realistic discourse ends up being revealed as a fiction, the ultimate illusion, the discourse of the real turned against itself. So, if parody can be defined as imitation with a critical commentary, or critical difference, what we observe in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is the maintenance of realistic setting, props, lighting, contrasted to the subversive language and behaviour of his characters. It is as though the naturalistic stage were being visited by critical metafictional characters.

In that sense, *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, first in its parodic aspects, but mostly in its denial of the purely representational, of the realistic, already reflects the post-modernist trend, whose beginning has been conventionally accepted as the early sixties (and it has even been suggested that its origin coincides with Kennedy’s assassination on 22 November 1963) despite earlier manifestations. Albee’s play is also contemporary of key post-modernist texts, such as Nabokov’s *Pale Fire* and Thomas Pynchon’s *V*, and acknowledges in its features as explained above its attunement to the most recent developments of drama and the theatre in its own time.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 327.

5.5 The game of “Analysing the Author”

Jerry Tallmer, for the *New York Post*, commented that Albee wrote from his own interior in metaphor. This applies to characteristics of his earlier plays, but it is in the case of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* that the author is really caught in his own game. By his constant playing with his characters, the forms and conventions of theatre and with his audience, he encourages the audience to take their turn in looking for other games in the play. His ludic techniques have blurred the boundaries, so we start wondering how much the play could comment on the author's biography. It does seem to bear some evidence of connection with his family life. Could it be that Albee, as an adopted misfit, saw his foster parents as deranged characters like George and Martha, who lived together out of a network of illusions? Was he the major illusion that brought them together, an imaginary child to an infertile home?

Albee was not his parents' real child; he was not the son they wished him to be, but simply an abstraction, a “prop” or “bean bag” like the kid in the play. The similarity extends further, as Albee also left home at an early age, to escape the constraints of his “home” life and the fights between his foster parents. In a sense, by leaving their house and abandoning their lifestyle, he can be said to have “killed” his parents, like George did, and have been considered dead by them.

Another possible participation of the author is in the voice we hear behind the character's—especially George's—in several scenes. George's discussion of the threats to society and mankind represented by unscrupulous scientists like Nick really show the contrast between the two characters, but it is so emphatic and long as to make us detect the voicing of values and principles of someone else on the matter. Who else but the author? Could it also be that in his stating

that he will not give up Berlin there is the added sense that Albee himself will not give up the style that guided him to success in Berlin with *The Zoo Story*? In his interviews, the author expresses his contempt for career-obsessed, achievement-oriented people, very much like George's contempt for Nick. By the way, that is very similar to the contempt voiced by Jerry against Peter's commonsensical lifestyle, in *The Zoo Story*.

Paradoxical as it may seem at first, the clearest intrusion by the author is also his subtlest. By that I mean the Western Union telegramme received by George; although it is the least suspected to relate to Albee, once detected it is the easiest to attribute to him. After leaving home and college, Albee took up a series of temporary jobs, one of which was that of delivering telegrammes. He stated during an interview that:

It was a nice job because I walked and didn't have to concentrate on the delivering of the telegrams... Except I didn't like delivering the collect wires from the city hospitals telling people about the death of a relative. I got to the point where I'd tell them to read without paying for it, and then I'd run off to escape the wails of grief.¹⁴⁷

This might just have been the "little seventy-year-old" Western Union boy's comment after having delivered the telegramme about the death of Martha's son, had he really appeared in the play. Despite that, we observe an instance of the author's drawing from personal experience for his fictional work, of art imitating life. But much more important, this connection allows us to understand how metatheatrical the play actually is. In looking for a way out from the mythological maze he and Martha have built, George has the idea of a telegramme delivered to him (p. 230). The audience knows there is no such

¹⁴⁷ WAGER, Walter (Ed.). *The Playwrights Speak*. (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1969). p.22.

telegramme, and they have seen no crazy Billy deliver it. What the audience probably fails to notice is that the fictional message is delivered by the implied author himself, in a way very similar to the *deus ex machina* devices that untangled the plot in Greek drama. This “trick” conveniently matches the logic behind the mythical son: in order to kill an illusion, you produce another.

Those elements do not render the play autobiographical, but raise a few interesting questions. Isn't it extremely ironical that the passages of wildest fantasy in the play, of most aggressive confrontation with the conventions of realism, are in fact those closest to real life? Can we deny that the picture has been reversed, and that it is the naturalistic element in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*—based as it is on other plays and not on facts from the armchair world—that is the most fictional? Here we then find an agreement between Albee and the metafictional writers who affirm that their narcissistic fiction is closer to “real life” than realism ever was.

5.6 The child made of words

In his plays, Edward Albee makes a point of attacking the norms of the American way of life. Marianne Kesting¹⁴⁸ goes farther to say that he is actually the first major American dramatist to openly confront three aspects of his country's culture: the prevailing realism of dramatic form of expression, the morals and principles of the average citizen, and the primacy of the “American way of life” as the only satisfactory lifestyle. In *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* the mythical child seems to be the fulcrum about which his criticism turns to reach those three fronts of attack. Martha and George's joint illusion is a device which allows him to rebel against all three levels simultaneously.

¹⁴⁸ KESTING, Marianne. *Panorama des zeitgenössischen Theaters : 50 literarische Porträts.* (München : R. Piper & Co., 1962).

Albee declared in an interview that: "There is contained in the play [...] an attempt to examine the success or failure of American revolutionary principles."¹⁴⁹ That is reflected in the names George and Martha, in the confrontation of history, art, the European style embodied by George with Nick's science, American pragmatism and drive. There is always the suggestion that the host's imaginary son stands for the "American dream" (or in George's words, "our own little all-American something-or-other," p. 196) of unrestricted personal fulfilment for all—the hope that crossed the ocean with the first settlers. This equation exposes the principles that bind a whole nation together as a self-created illusion. In other words, through the imaginary child Albee is able to make his social criticism to the effect that the American society relies too much on illusions of its own making, on the mythology it has built around itself.

What the author seems to be presenting is the enactment of the same view of the United States found in Jean Baudrillard's *America*.¹⁵⁰ Baudrillard states that:

Americans believe in facts, but not in facticity. They do not know that facts are factitious, as their name suggests. It is in this belief in facts, in the total credibility of what is done or seen, in this pragmatic evidence of things and an accompanying contempt for what may be called appearances or the play of apperances [sic]—a face does not deceive, behaviour does not deceive, a scientific process does not deceive, nothing deceives, nothing is ambivalent (and at bottom this is true: nothing deceives, there are no lies, *there is only simulation*, which is precisely the facticity of facts)—that the Americans are a true utopian society, in their religion of the *fait accompli*, in the naivety of their deductions, in their ignorance of the evil genius of things.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ DOWNER, Alan S. (Ed.) "An Interview with Edward Albee." In: *The American Theater* (Washington, 1967).

¹⁵⁰ BAUDRILLARD, J. *America* (New York : Verso, 1988); translated by Chris Turner from the original *Amérique*. (Paris : Bernard Grasset, 1986).

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

Here we find a perfect description of Nick and Honey's naivety in face of George and Martha's games; they are only too ready to believe everything the hosts tell them (How can they help it when the hosts themselves believe in their myth?). They do not act upon the suspicion raised every now and then by the contradictions they can detect. Consider George, in contrast. *He* is able to recognize the hidden reality of Nick's motives for marrying Honey, for he has a characteristic that Baudrillard points out as typical of "all other societies," namely "some kind of suspicion of reality [...] a belief in the power of appearances."¹⁵² Another interesting illustration of this contrast in the play is that of the scene in Act I in which George expresses his suspicion of the scientific progress represented by Nick. Martha and the guests, instead, are fascinated by his description of a future without ugliness and weakness, and that shows all their typical optimistic, pragmatic blind faith in progress. Once more we observe the voicing through George of the author's point of view. The European bend noticeable in George is the same European influence detectable in Albee's style, and his criticism of American society is very European in tone—which is probably the reason behind his high prestige among the Germans, for instance.

The belief in facts accounts to a great extent for the theatricallity of the American way of life. The mass media has had an impact on that society as nowhere else, manipulating public opinion through a style of presentation, a discourse, that replaces reality and "makes" the facts. Christopher Lasch puts it thus: "the rise of mass media makes the categories of truth and falsehood irrelevant to an evaluation of their influence [;] truth has given way to credibility, facts to statements that sound authoritative without conveying any

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

authoritative information.”¹⁵³ Similarly, politics and public behaviour become a spectacle, what Lasch calls “street theatre,” or role-playing. Identity itself is a fiction, a myth forged by the individual and presented to society as reality. These manufactured illusions that acquire the status of fact through a realistic discourse include the idealization of the “all-American hero.” And this is clearly one of Albee’s pet hates. He attacked such myth openly in earlier plays, such as *The American Dream*, and charges again, this time parodying both the creation and belief in such an illusion just to shock the audience with the exposure of the lies. But, ironically, it is Albee’s own optimistic belief in a version of this American utopia that we see in the closing scene of *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, when “der Schluß des Stückes, die Versöhnung des Ehepaares über dem geopfertem Sohn ist Albees Utopie, eine resignierte, illusionlose Utopie für Amerika.”¹⁵⁴

The criticism is also thematized in that Martha has come to act according to the belief on an imaginary child, the same way that the American society materializes what for others would constitute only dreams. I remember the statement from Professor Thomas Beebee—a Californian himself—to the effect that American history is not only reproduced in Disneyland, but *is* Disneyland. Baudrillard says about this utopia that American society “knows [it], believes in it, and in the end, the others have come to believe in it too.”¹⁵⁵ The simulacrum has become a key cultural factor in the United States. In an age when old

¹⁵³ LASCH, Christopher. *The Culture of Narcissism : American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*. (New York : Warner Books, 1979). p. 141.

¹⁵⁴ The end of the play, the conciliation of the couple over the sacrificed son is Albee’s utopia, a resigned, illusion-free utopia for America. CHRISTADLER, Martin. *Amerikanische Literatur der Gegenwart*. (Stuttgart : Alfred Kröner, 1973). p. 498.

¹⁵⁵ BAUDRILLARD, J. *America* (New York : Verso, 1988); translated by Chris Turner from the original *Amérique*. (Paris : Bernard Grasset, 1986). p. 77.

certainties have been destroyed, the reliance on a national mythology becomes the staple diet of millions and becomes an element of national identity. In such a state of affairs, who can afford to let go of all established illusions and confront the ugly face of reality? Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf? Yet this is the all too necessary change to be fought for. Albee holds that his share in this commitment is to expose the frailty of the middle-class myth-based, sedative-ridden, self-satisfying behaviour. This is done through the harsh attack on intimacy that Jerry imposes on Peter. It is also done through a couple's intense fight for an illusion of their own making. In his attempt to shake the audience out of their catatonic state, Albee goes beyond the bone (the bond?) and down to the marrow.

Albee's attack, however, is not restricted to the American society. At a more general level, George and Martha's ability to fictionalize is emblematic of everyone's necessity to produce agreeable, or apologetic, versions of the facts that involve or merely surround them, mainly those that belong to the past. This fictionalization is extensively exploited by post-modernism. Consider this extract from Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*:

But this is preposterous? A character is either 'real' or 'imaginary'? If you think that, *hypocrite lecteur*, I can only smile. You do not even think of your own past as quite real; you dress it up, you gild it or blacken it, censor it, tinker with it... fictionalize it, in a word, and put it away on a shelf—your book, your romanced autobiography. We are all in flight from the real reality. That is a basic definition of *Homo sapiens*.¹⁵⁶

The audience (both actual and intrafictional) takes George and Martha's son as one of those absent realities which are only spoken about, and not

¹⁵⁶ FOWLES, John. *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. 4. Printing. (St Albans, Herts : Panther, 1975). p. 87.

shown, in the theatre. What is added then is a fifth function of the dramatic language to those listed by Ingarden,¹⁵⁷ namely that language can also create a reality, the same way the literary discourse produces a reality of its own. The child is created as a narrative, at the verbal level; it is a speech act, a verbal action imposed by the hosts on their guests. If the guests only had asked for the child to speak for itself—through non-verbal evidence: photographs, toys perhaps—the illusion would have been broken. Like the stranger in the story of Momaday's "man made of words,"¹⁵⁸ the child would then reveal its own nature through its silence; in this context, silence is equivalent to inexistence, hence: a "child made of words." So the illusion cannot last for long. As soon as the following day Nick and Honey might ask other members of the community about George and Martha's son, and they will be doubly exposed, as liars, "lunatics," or both. So George has to take certain measures in order to save face. This need is the basis for the exorcism performed in Act III.

5.7 Invitation to a murder

After Martha has "sprung a leak" about their imaginary son, George cannot let the guests go without performing some kind of blackmail (Get the Guests) or exorcising their myth. That is why it is necessary for him to detain the guests long enough and to create the structure of the ritualistic exorcism inside the play. Similar to games, the ritual obeys the convention of a circumscribed "holy

¹⁵⁷ INGARDEN, Roman. "As funções da linguagem teatral." In: *O Signo Teatral : a Semiologia Aplicada à Arte Dramática*. Trad. Org. Luiz Arthur Nunes *et al.* (Porto Alegre : Editora Globo, 1977).

¹⁵⁸ MOMADAY, N. Scott. "The Man Made of Words." In: FITZ, Earl. *Rediscovering the New World : Inter-American Literature in a Comparative Context*. (Iowa City : University of Iowa Press, 1991).

ground,” limited duration and specific rules for its performance. Notice how George gathers all participants together by having Nick fetch his wife in the bathroom. He then invokes the presence of the son as if they were taking part in a spiritualist session; Martha aids him in this last function by acting as an assistant priest. The language then assumes an enchanting role, its rhythm and tone taking the place of meaning as far as significance is concerned. So secondary does meaning become that we no longer have the same idiom, it is not necessary. It is important to observe how these characteristics are restricted to the duration of the “session.” When the exorcism is completed, the English language is resumed, the sound features of the dialogue again fade into the disattended track to favour meaning; similarly, Martha collapses in exhaustion as some types of black magic practitioners, or the recipients of the spirits of the dead or the patients of exorcism, do.

Where do Honey and Nick fit this pattern? They are the uninitiated visitors, foreigners who attend a local ritual with an awe and bafflement not totally unlike that of civilized explorers witnessing the natives’ display of violence, blood, cries and paint in rites of initiation or cannibalistic feasts. The guests are not explained the rules, but can somehow sense the extraordinary in their hosts’ behaviour. The performance goes on; this time, however, the signalling of the breach from every-day life—through the guests’ gestures, seriousness, emotional involvement and their whole discourse—ensures that the circumscribed space and ground for the ritual is respected. So deep is the effect that Nick does not bring out accusations or questions his hosts any further when he comes to an understanding of the situation. The same condition is experienced vicariously by the extrafictional audience, uninvited guests to the performance of an exorcism, eye-witnesses to a sacrificial rite, who came

perhaps merely to be entertained, out of curiosity, and leave the premisses feeling exhausted by the strain of their participation.

Whereas in *The Zoo Story* a person is assaulted by another who brings about confrontation with reality, in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* the guests are sucked into this confrontation, which is a metaphor for the theatrical situation: they experience this transformation as witnesses to their own crude reality. George tells of their illusions/truths; Honey recognizes the story the same way the audience is called to recognize its own standing in an escapist society—the upsetting night causes changes. Once the veils are ripped, another picture emerges. Nick is not the stallion he was supposed to be, while Honey, rather than sterile, shows herself as capable of reproduction (or at least eager to try). Nick has undergone a change, perhaps understood that his values were superficial and dangerously close to his hosts' fantasy. Honey sees the fact that a child might give meaning to a relationship based on illusion so far, and otherwise doomed to fail. The cards have been turned to show their true faces and values. Religion and language have been exposed as myth-making machines, so that the sympathy that emerges from confrontation is mostly silent. After a fight without winners, what remains is the instinct to survive.

5.8 A funny requiem

I have emphasized, on several occasions, the dual level of audiences in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and my readers may be wondering what the point is. In fact, it is only through that duality that we can fully apprehend the comic side of the play. I must admit that on the first viewing I did not laugh at all—at most through clenched-teeth, to use the image suggested by one critic. Gottfried says it is a play without a bit of a laugh in it. But I did laugh when I

read it, that being my second exposition to its bitter humour. And I was not laughing at George's and Martha's jokes as much as at the role to be played by the audience. The funniest part was the incongruity of Nick and Honey's position; having come for a nightcap, they are caught in an Alice-in-Wonderland sort of nightmare, at the same time amusing and terrifying. The living room of a campus house has become the playground for a couple of maniacs, the magic world where the logic of social conventions collapses, the holy ground for a ritualistic sacrifice. Now the absurd of their situation is the absurd of the actual audience they symbolise. Their anguish to make sense of the play "The Exorcism" is ours to understand "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf."¹⁵⁹ The spectator is only totally free to laugh at the jokes if he sees that the jokes are addressed to him, and not to the guests, but at the latter's expense. The viewer that is as naive as Honey will laugh at the jokes just because he realises they are jokes, and not because he has understood them. Those who identify with Nick will remain serious all along, and find the play just intriguing, if not a bore. The viewer who attains the necessary ironic detachment—one distinct both in kind and level from Nick's detachment—will watch George's snapdragon "spears" fly over Nick's dumbfolded, thick head, cross the orchestra pit, and hit his neighbour in the next sit right between the eyes.

The more the spectator grasps the mirroring performed by Honey and Nick, the funnier their sorrow over the news of the car accident will seem, and he will be reciting the *requiem* along with George "barely able to stop exploding with laughter" (p.234). But in the end it is silence that rules, for

¹⁵⁹ The quotation marks are employed here to indicate the distinction between "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" the part I am referring to, and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* the whole play.

laughter subsides and sympathy takes over. Like George, we know we have played our game and laughed at someone else's pain, and that was ugly and a shame. The final irony has then turned on us, but only we can see it. It is time to dismiss the actors, tell them "you [four] go now, good night," and comfort our poor neighbour-spectator with a lullaby; perhaps (why not?) with "Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf, Virginia Woolf, Virginia Woolf..."

CONCLUSION

I'm playing games, like a painter who includes in his picture a mirror in which he shows himself standing outside the picture painting it.

Brigid Brophy

The working hypothesis formulated at the beginning of this study was that the four major charges against *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*—those of covert homosexuality, overt misogyny, lack of originality and a faulty ending—stemmed from a single source: the critics' misunderstanding of the convention employed in the play. In order to prove my point I set out in an investigation of characteristics which contradicted the play's adherence to the naturalistic tradition. The key factor binding all of the most different elements together in such contradiction of realistic portrayal is the ludic treatment they receive from the author. Once it is the playful behaviour of the characters that indicates a similar intention from Albee, that was the starting point.

The analysis of the characters and their games offered the opportunity to identify a series of playful moves in the relationship between the hosts, guests and between both groups. Their arrangement or distribution, like that of playing-cards, denied the division into two groups, in a confrontation of husbands versus wives. That was confirmed by the analysis of the psychological games played, which revealed unheeded complexities that defy the simplification of attributing good or evil, guilt or innocence to either of the sex groups, weakening any claim of a misogynist nature.

Instead of a division according to sex, we observed a much more important split into performers and audience, hosts and guests respectively. The analysis showed that Martha and George are self-conscious of their performance before their guests, making open references to their condition, discussing the rules of their games, acting as masters of ceremony and ritual, and creating a fictional level of their own. Honey and Nick then reflect the role of the actual audience upon the stage, once more demonstrating the play's narcissistic aspects. On the stage they illustrate a meeting of the authorial figure with their spectators.

If there is a duplicity of levels in relation to the characters, a similar split could be identified in the investigation of the main textual codes that compose the play. These highlight two enigmas that maintain suspense and momentum in the play—the question of who is afraid of life without illusions, and the mysterious child the hosts fight for—one framing the other, thus leading to the identification of two levels inside the text, i. e. two different “plays,” an internal one performed by Martha and George for their guests, and another made up of the total performance of the four characters. This again proves the metafictional bend of the text. The richness of this structure is further enhanced by a range of textual references, in the form of allusions, that activate elements from a variety of sources, adding both dimension to the plot and characterization and clues to the enigmas proposed.

The two last functions are not restricted to the allusions, but exploited through a number of language games, surveyed in Chapter IV. From the overall balance of the dialogue to the jokes played mainly by the hosts, there is a significant self-awareness in the language of the play, defining characters and conflicts and exposing the dualities inherent in the text. The significance of the ludic use of words was discussed, focusing especially on the conscious

exploitation of the capacities and limitations of language. Besides that, the puns, quotations, ambiguities, paradoxes, etc. reflect the structuration of the play into its two distinct levels.

The next step encompassed the study of the creation and use of fiction by George and Martha, a characteristic which defies the distinction between reality and illusion. The frame-break constituted by their mythical son has important symbolic relevance. Firstly addressing the question of disguised homosexuality in the play, I can contest that the characters' infertility and frustrated relationships proved to be more significant as the author's criticism on American (academic) society. The exaggeration of action which also suggests homosexuality was shown to be due to the characters' self-conscious performance.

The mythical child constitutes a playful treatment of the question of fictionality itself. Can we ever be sure of what is real and what is an illusion? The reversability of these categories in the play reflect their undecidability in "real" life. Albee's implied meaning is that everyone lives surrounded by self-made fictions, but the Americans even more so. In this sense, his play acquires a sort of moral function, that of making people aware of the need to face life without the protection of comforting illusions. That is the reason for the symbolic exorcism that ends the play. The ritualistic aspect of the latter is closely related to the characteristics of the game, and as it is the exorcism of a fantasy, it can be considered as another game played by George and Martha. This again reminds us of the serious nature of the games played. They are amusing but not devoid of serious connotations, like that of criticism.

Like the symbolic level, the formal level depends heavily on the device of the imaginary son, and this is the point where this investigation addresses the

question of the play's originality. Having believed Albee's play an imitation of Strindberg's *The Bond*, some of the critics transferred many of the latter's characteristics to *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, the charge of misogyny, for instance. But not only is the idea of imitation unfounded, it also distracts us from the author's real use of past tradition. So it is that many came to see the play as belonging to naturalistic drama, and neglected the overall playful tone employed by Albee.

Based on the previous observations of the self-consciousness of character and structure in the play, the analysis of the mythical son demonstrates that the naturalistic conventions presented were not used in a pure form, but underwent a parodic treatment. The same way Albee replaces an imaginary child for the absent child of *The Bond*, he makes use of naturalistic setting, lighting, etc. only to establish a contrast with the exaggerated, ritualistic, narcissistic acting and language of the play. So, he was able to incorporate in his work contemporary aspects and concerns, such as uncertainty as to the "truth," self-consciousness and ambiguity—all the elements that composed the play at the level of character, language, intertextuality, and so on, reflecting the very fabric of the play, woven with threads from the most different traditions, not only naturalism. This critical stance permits the dialogue of different traditions, contradicting those who understood the play as realistic in form, for instead of a realistic rendering of action,

we find chaos, irrationality and strangeness, an attack on the glib ideological presuppositions of any armchair consumer. The 'solution' is not so much discovering what has happened, but of probing 'reality.'

Now these are characteristics totally alien to naturalism; they seem to point, instead, towards the subversive, self-contradictory content and the

narcissistic, parodic form of post-modernist works. This is not to say that Albee wrote *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* as post-modernist drama, but only that he was very much in tune with the developments in his field and in the world around him, and it is only natural that his work should reflect all the concerns and elements that lay scattered about. Nowhere is Albee more contemporary than in his ludic devotion. Just like he allows his characters to revel in their games, he uses them as his toys, and play profusively with form, content, with the tradition, with his audience, with himself.

Now the mythical child is his master move in this game of playing games. It is the "kid" that undermines the audience's certainties, that subverts meaning and allows for all the social and cultural criticism made by Albee, without it the play would not say half as much. Therefore, instead of the weak device that spoils the play, according to so many critics, it is the spice that gives it taste. To understand the significance of the "kid" is to reach the key that opens the way to understand all the games that are being played before us on the stage, if only we are not too much addicted to either the overtly theatrical (as in expressionistic, epic, symbolic, absurdist drama) or the stubbornly realistic (as in naturalism).

Still maintaining our card-game metaphor, we can therefore state that the "realism" of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is a bluff. Just like the living room in George and Martha's house, ordinary but messier than usual living rooms in which we spend our evenings, becomes a battlefield and the circumscribed ground for a sacrificial rite, in the space-time bracket of the performance, the play absorbs the features of its internal games, it *becomes* a game. And the game, like the sphynx, demands that the reader/spectator either

decipher it or be devoured—if the audience does not see the game, they become its victim, the believers in a bluff.

The choice of an approach that privileges the ludic side of the play has proved, in the end, essential to our full understanding of Albee's work. Only very superficially does the play fit the naturalistic interpretation given to it, for:

the game element, then, breaks away from the norm of realistic writing already established in a text (or, if all elements of that text are playful, then the text as a whole breaks with the norm of realistic discourse).¹⁶⁰

The analysis then clarifies many aspects that had remained obscure, like the the meaning of the references in the title, or the effectiveness of the end of the *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* It amounts to a reassessment of the value of the play, indicating that it was abreast with contemporary developments in form and content, and that its enormous success was not undeserved, even though a great proportion of its admirers were not able at the time to understand and appreciate it fully. And I think it is to Albee's advantage that complete understanding was not necessary then.

When so many questions have been answered, a number of others present themselves as challenges. It remains to be investigated, for instance, what the relations between the characteristics pointed out in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and that of other contemporary plays are. Besides that, it seems like a logical follow-up to extend such analysis to encompass other of Albee's works, in order to observe how pervasive and explanatory the ludic element is on the whole of his production, as was done by Rothstein in relation to Stoppard.¹⁶¹

These investigations could lead to a re-evaluation of Albee's work and his

¹⁶⁰ HUTCHINSON, P. *Games Authors Play*. (London : Methuen, 1983). p. 13.

¹⁶¹ ROTHSTEIN, B. R. W. *Playing the Game : the Work of Tom Stoppard* (Rhode Island, 1979. PhD dissertation, University of Rhode Island).

contribution to American drama. The study just concluded might be a first step in that direction. Can we then expect the findings of this analysis to increase the acceptance of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*? It would be too optimistic to hope for that. The same detractors that found fault in the end of the play will probably be equally annoyed by the suggestion that the author had been playing a game all the time. He was playing poker, or hearts, or bridge, and when his partners expected him to play trumps and his opponents admitted to have been defeated, he revealed that he had been bluffing. After the playing of the Jack of Diamonds, the laying of the Queen of Spades, the concealment of the King in his hand, the trump card has faded as in a magician's trick—but how many rounds and matches in the armchair world have not been won by bluffing? After all, bluffing is part of the game.

The house was quiet and the world
was calm.

Wallace Stevens

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

1. ABEL, L. *Metatheatre : A New View of Dramatic Form*. New York : Hill & Wang, 1963.
2. ALBEE, Edward. "The American Dream." In: *New American Drama*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex : Penguin, 1966.
3. ———. "The Zoo Story." In: *Two Plays by Edward Albee : Author of Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* New York : Signet Books, [1961].
4. ———. *The Death of Bessie Smith*. New York : Coward-McCann, 1960.
5. ———. *The Lady from Dubuque : a Play*. New York : Atheneum, 1980.
6. ———. *The Sandbox*. New York : Coward-McCann, 1960.
7. ———. *Tiny Alice*. London : Cape, 1966.
8. ———. *Um Equilíbrio Delicado*. (Trad. Sérgio Viotti). Rio de Janeiro : Bloch, 1969.
9. ———. *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* 1. Signet Printing. New York : Penguin, 1983. 246 p.
10. ———. *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* 24. ed. New York : Atheneum, 1978. 245 p.
11. ARAÚJO, Inês Lacerda. *Introdução à Filosofia da Ciência*. Curitiba : Editora da UFPR, 1993.
12. ARGYLE, Michael. *Social Interaction*. 4. ed. London : Tavistock, 1978.
13. ARPE, Verner. *Knaurs Schauspielführer : eine Geschichte des Dramas*. 3. ed. München : Droemer & Knau, 1968.
14. ARTAUD, Antonin. "The Theatre of Cruelty." (Trans. Mary Caroline Richards). In: BENTLEY, E. *The Theory of the Modern Stage : an*

Introduction to Modern Theatre and Drama. Harmondsworth, Middlesex : Penguin, 1990.

15. ARTAUD, Antonin. *The Theatre and Its Double*. New York : Grove Press, 1958.
16. AUSTIN, J. L. *How to Do Things with Words : the William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University in 1955*. 2. ed. Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1977.
17. AVEDON, E. M. & SUTTON-SMITH, B. *The Study of Games*. New York : London, 1971.
18. BAKHTIN, Mikhail. *A Cultura Popular na Idade Média e no Renascimento : o Contexto de François Rabelais*. (Trad. Yara Frateschi Vieira). São Paulo : HUCITEC, 1987.
19. ———. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Ann Arbor : Ardis, 1973.
20. ———. *Rabelais and His World*. Cambridge, Mass. : M.I.T. Press, 1968.
21. ———. "The Role of Games in Rabelais." In: *Yale French Studies : Game, Play, Literature*, 41(1968):124-32.
22. BARKER, Clive. *Theatre Games*. New York : Drama Book Specialists Publishers, 1977.
23. BARTHES, Roland *et al.* *Literatura e Realidade : Que é o Realismo?* (Trad. Tereza Coelho). Lisboa : Publicações Dom Quixote, 1984.
24. BARTHES, Roland. "The Reality Effect." In: TODOROV, Tzvetan (Ed.) *French Literary Theory Today*. New York : Cambridge University Press, 1982.
25. ———. *S/Z: an Essay*. (Trans. Richard Miller). New York : Hill & Wang, 1974.
26. BAUDRILLARD, Jean. *Amérique*. Paris : Bernard Grasset, 1986.
27. ———. *America*. (Trans. Chris Turner). New York : Verso, 1988.

28. BAXANDALL, Lee. "The Theater of Edward Albee." In: KERNAN, A. (Ed.) *The Modern American Theater : a Collection of Critical Essays*. Englewood Cliffs, N. J. : Prentice-Hall, 1967. (Twentieth Century Views).
29. BAYLEY, John. *The Uses of Division*. London : Chatto & Windus, 1976.
30. BEJA, Morris. *Film and Literature : an Introduction*. New York : Longman, 1979.
31. BELL, Quentin. *Virginia Woolf : a Biography*. New York : Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972.
32. BEN-PORAT, Ziva. "The Poetics of Literary Allusion." *PTL : a Journal for Descriptive Poetics and Theory of Literature*, 1(1):105-28, 1976.
33. BENJAMIN, Walter. "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit." *Gesammelte Schriften* Vol 1.2. Frankfurt : Suhrkamp, 1974.
34. ———. *Magia e Técnica, Arte e Política : Ensaio Sobre Literatura e História da Cultura*. (Trad. Sérgio Paulo Rouanet) 3. ed. São Paulo : Brasiliense, 1987. (Obras escolhidas, vol 1).
35. BENTLEY, Eric. *The Playwright as Thinker : a Study of Drama in Modern Times*. New York : Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967.
36. BENTLEY, Eric (Ed.) *The Theory of the Modern Stage : an Introduction to Modern Theatre and Drama*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex : Penguin, 1990.
37. BERMAN, N. D. *Playful Fiction and Fictional Players : Games, Sport, and Survival in Contemporary American Fiction*. Port Washington, New York : London, 1981.
38. BERMEL, Albert. *Contradictory Characters : an Interpretation of the Modern Theatre*. New York : E. P. Dutton, 1973.
39. BERNE, Eric. *Games People Play : the Psychology of Human Relationships*. New York : Ballantine Books, 1964.

40. BERNE, Eric. *Os Jogos da Vida : a Psicologia Transacional e o Relacionamento entre as Pessoas.* (Adapt. Júlio de Moraes; trad. E. Artens). Rio de Janeiro : Artenova, 1974.
41. BIGSBY, C. W. E. *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama.* Vol 2. 4. ed. New York : Cambridge University Press, 1989.
42. ———. *Confrontation and Commitment : a Study of Contemporary American Drama, 1959-1966.* [S. l.] : University of Missouri Press, 1968.
43. BLUM, Daniel. *A Pictorial History of American Theatre : 1960-1976.* New 4. ed. New York : Crown Publishers, 1977.
44. BOGATYREV, Petr. "Os Signos do Teatro." In: *O Signo Teatral : a Semiologia Aplicada à Arte Dramática.* (Trad. Org. Luiz Arthur Nunes et al.). Porto Alegre : Editora Globo, 1977.
45. BORDMAN, Gerald. *The Oxford Companion to American Theatre.* 2. ed. New York : Oxford University Press, 1992.
46. BORDWELL, David. *Narration in the Fiction Film.* Madison : University of Wisconsin Press, 1985. 370 p.
47. BORNHEIM, Gerd. *O Sentido e a Máscara.* São Paulo : Perspectiva, 1975.
48. BOULTON, Marjorie. *The Anatomy of Drama.* 6. ed. London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983
49. BRANIGAN, Edward. *Narrative Comprehension and Film.* London : Routledge, 1992.
50. BROCKETT, Oscar G. *The Theatre : an Introduction.* 2. ed. New York : Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1969.
51. BROOKE-ROSE, Christine. *A Rhetoric of the Unreal : Studies in Narrative & Structure, Especially of the Fantastic.* New York : Cambridge University Press, 1981.
52. BROWN, John Mason. *Dramatis Personae : a Retrospective Show.* 12. ed. New York : Viking, 1963. p.536-542.

53. BROWN, John Russell; HARRIS, Bernard. *American Theatre*. London: Edward Arnold Publishers, 1967. (Stratford-Upon-Avon Studies 10).
54. BRUGGER, Walter. *Dicionário de Filosofia*. (Trad. Antônio Pinto de Carvalho). São Paulo : Herder, 1962.
55. BRUSS, E. W. "The Game of Literature and Some Literary Games." *New Literary History*,9(1):153-72, Autumn, 1977.
56. BRUSTEIN, R. *The Theatre of Revolt : an Approach to Modern Drama*. 3. ed. Boston : Little, Brown & Co., 1964.
57. CAILLOIS, Roger. *Man, Play, and Games*. (Trans. Meyer Barash). New York : Free Press, 1961.
58. CALINESCU, Matei. *Five Faces of Modernity : Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*. Durham : Duke University Press, 1987.
59. CAMATI, Anna Stegh. *The Seriocomic Theatre of Tom Stoppard : Parodic Theatricality in Travesties*. São Paulo : USP, 1987. 228 p. PhD Dissertation, USP.
60. *CAMBRIDGE International Dictionary of English*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1995.
61. CAMPO, Carlos. "The Role of *Beyond The Forest* in Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*" In: *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 22, 3, 1994.
62. CHARNEY, H.; PLOTTEL, J. P. *Intertextuality : New Perspectives in Criticism*. New York : New York Literary Forum, 1978.
63. CHARNEY, M. *Comedy High and Low : an Introduction to the Experience of Comedy*. New York : Oxford University Press, 1978.
64. CLARK, B. H. (Ed.) *European Theories of the Drama*. New York : Crown Publishers, 1965.
65. COHN, Ruby. "Terms of the Tragicomic Mixture." *Drama Survey*,5:186-91, 1966.
66. ———. *Currents in Contemporary Drama*. Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1969.

67. ———. *New American Dramatists : 1960-1980*. London : MacMillan, 1982. (MacMillan Modern Dramatists).
68. COLIN, Saul. "Who's afraid of Edward Albee?" In: *Plays and Players*. London : March 1963.
69. DAY, Martin S. *History of American Literature : from 1910 to the Present*. New York : Doubleday & Company, 1971. (Doubleday College Course Guides).
70. DERRIDA, Jacques. *A Escritura e a Diferença*. (Trad. Maria Beatriz Marques Nizza da Silva). São Paulo : Perspectiva, 1971.
71. DETWEILER, R. "Games and Play in Modern American Fiction." *Contemporary Literature*, 17, 1 (Winter 1976) p. 44-62.
72. DOWNER, Alan S. (Ed.) *The American Theater*. Washington : Forum Series, 1967. (Voice of America Forum Series).
73. DRIVER, Tom F. "What's the Matter with Edward Albee?" In: KERNAN, Alvin B. (Ed.) *The Modern American Theater : a Collection of Critical Essays*. Englewood Cliffs, N. J. : Prentice-Hall, 1967. (Twentieth Century Views). p. 99-103.
74. DUTTON, Richard. *Modern Tragicomedy and the British Tradition : Beckett, Pinter, Stoppard, Albee and Storey*. Brighton : Harvester Press, 1986.
75. ECO, Umberto. *The Role of the Reader : Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*. Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1984.
76. EHRMANN, J. (Ed) "Game, Play, Literature," Special issue, *Yale French Studies*, 41 (1968).
77. EHRMANN, J. "Homo Ludens Revisited." In: ———. "Game, Play, Literature." Special issue, *Yale French Studies*, 41 (1968). p. 31-57.
78. ELAM, Kair. *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*. New York : Methuen, 1980.
79. ELIOT, T. S. "Tradition and the Individual Talent." In: HAYWARD, J. (Ed.) *Selected Prose : T. S. Eliot*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex : Penguin, 1953.

80. ———. *The Sacred Wood : Essays on Poetry and Criticism*. London : Methuen, 1963.
81. EMMEL, Felix. *Ro Ro Ro Schauspielführer : von Aischylos bis Peter Weiss*. Hamburg : Rowohlt Taschenbuch, 1968.
82. ESSLIN, Martin. *Uma Anatomia do Drama*. (Trad. Barbara Heliodora). Rio de Janeiro : Zahar, 1976.
83. ———. *The Anatomy of Drama*. London : Maurice Temple Smith, 1976.
84. ———. *The Theatre of the Absurd*. Revised and enlarged ed. New York : Pelican Books, 1983.
85. EVANS, Gareth Lloyd. *The Language of Modern Drama*. London : J. M. Dent & Sons, 1977.
86. FARB, P. *Word Play : What Happens When People Talk*. London : [s. n.], 1974.
87. FERRATER MORA, José. *Diccionario de Filosofia*. Tomo II. Buenos Aires : Editorial Sudamericana, 1971.
88. FINGERMANN, Gregório. *El Juego y sus Proyecciones Sociales*. Buenos Aires : Ateneo, 1970.
89. FOWLES, John. "The Enigma." In: BRADBURY, M. (Ed.) *The Penguin Book of Modern British Short Stories*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex : Penguin, 1988. p.189-233.
90. ———. *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. 4. Printing. St Albans, Herts : Panther Books, 1975.
91. GABBARD, Lucina P. "Edward Albee's Triptych on Abandonment." *Twentieth Century Literature*, 28(1):14-33, 1982.
92. GANZ, Arthur. *Realms of the Self : Variations on a Theme in Modern Drama*. New York : New York University Press, 1980.
93. GASS, William H. *A Ficção e as Imagens da Vida*. (Trad. Edilson Alkmim Cunha). São Paulo : Cultrix, 1974.

94. GASSNER, John (Ed.). *Best American Plays : Fifth Series, 1957-1963*. 7. ed. New York : Crown, 1973.
95. GATES Jr, Henry Louis. *The Signifying Monkey : a Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. 1. Paperback ed. New York : Oxford University Press, 1989.
96. GEORGE, Kathleen. *Rhythm in Drama*. Pittsburgh : University of Pittsburgh Press, 1980.
97. GOFFMAN, E. *Frame Analysis : an Essay on the Organization of Experience*. Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1974.
98. GOTTFRIED, Martin. *Teatro Dividido : a cena americana no pós-guerra*. (Trad. Eglê Malheiros). Rio de Janeiro : Bloch, 1970.
99. ———. *A Theater Divided : the Postwar American Stage*. Boston : Little, Brown & Company, 1967.
100. GOULD, James A.; IORIO, John J. *Violence in Modern Literature*. San Francisco : Boyd & Fraser, 1972.
101. GRIFFITHS, A. Phillips (Ed.) *Philosophy and Literature*. New York : Cambridge, 1984.
102. GROFF, E. "Point of View in Modern Drama." *Modern drama*, 2:268-82, 1959/1960.
103. HARRIS, Roy. *Language, Saussure and Wittgenstein : How to Play Games with Words*. London : Routledge, 1991.
104. HARRIS, Thomas A. *I'm OK—You're OK*. 1. Paperback printing. New York : Avon Books, 1973.
105. HAYWARD, J. (Ed.) *Selected Prose : T. S. Eliot*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex : Penguin, 1953.
106. HENSCHEL, Uta. "Verhaltensforschung : Zeit zum Spielen." In: *Geo : das Reportage-Magazin*, 6 (Juni) : 66-79, 1995.
107. HIGHAM, Charles. *Bette Davis*. (Trad. Luiz Horácio da Matta). Rio de Janeiro : Francisco Alves, 1983.

108. HOWARTH, W. D. (Ed.) *Comic Drama : the European Heritage*. London : Methuen, 1978.
109. HUIZINGA, Johan. *Homo Ludens : o Jôgo como Elemento da Cultura*. (Trad. João Paulo Monteiro). São Paulo : Perspectiva, 1971.
110. HUTCHEON, Linda. *Narcissistic Narrative : the Metafictional Paradox*. London : Methuen, 1984.
111. ———. "Parody Without Ridicule: Observations on Modern Literary Parody." *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 5 :201-11, Spring 1978.
112. ———. *A Theory of Parody : the Teachings of Twentieth Century Art Forms*. London : Methuen, 1985.
113. HUTCHINSON, Peter. *Games Authors Play*. London : Methuen, 1983.
114. INGARDEN, Roman. "As funções da linguagem teatral." In: *O Signo Teatral : a Semiologia Aplicada à Arte Dramática*. (Trad. Org. Luiz Arthur Nunes *et al.*) Porto Alegre : Editora Globo, 1977.
115. INNES, Christopher. *Modern British Drama : 1890-1990*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1992.
116. IRWIN, W. R. *The Game of the Impossible : a Rhetoric of Fantasy*. Chicago : University of Illinois Press, 1976.
117. KAISER, Joachim. "Eheprobleme—Amerikanisch und Symbolisch." In: *Kleines Theatertagebuch*. Hamburg : Rowohlt Verlag, 1965.
118. KENNEDY, Andrew K. "Natural, Mannered and Parodic Dialogue." *Yearbook of English Studies*, 9 : 28-54, 1979.
119. ———. *Dramatic Dialogue : the Duologue of Personal Encounter*. New York : Cambridge University Press, 1983.
120. KERNAN, Alvin B. "The Attempted Dance : a Discussion of the Modern Theater." In: *Classics of the Modern Theatre*. New York : Harcourt, Brace & World, 1965.

121. KERNAN, Alvin B., (Ed.) *The Modern American theater : a Collection of Critical Essays*. Englewood Cliffs, N. J. : Prentice-Hall, 1967. (Twentieth Century Views).
122. KERR, Walter. "Why Do Authors Mix Fact and Fantasy?" *New York Times*, 19 Aug 1976. sec 5. p. 12.
123. ———. *Tragedy and Comedy*. 3. ed. New York : Simon & Schuster, 1967.
124. KERSTING, Marianne. "Edward Albee : Lektionen Über den Konformismus." In: *Panorama des zeitgenössischen Theaters : 50 literarische Porträts*. München : R. Piper & Co., 1962.
125. KIRBY, Ernest Theodore. *Ur-Drama : the Origins of Theatre*. New York : New York University Press, 1975.
126. KNOX, W. "On the Classification of Ironies." *Modern Philologie*, 70 : 53-62, Aug. 1972.
127. KORT, Wesley A. *Modern Fiction & Human Time : a Study in Narrative and Belief*. Tampa : University of South Florida Press, 1985.
128. KREITLER, H., KREITLER, S. *Psychology of the Arts*. Durham : Duke University Press, 1972.
129. LAMPORT, Harold. "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" In: GASSNER, John. *Best American Plays : Fifth Series 1957-1963*. 7. ed. New York : Crown Publishers, 1973. p.146-148.
130. LASCH, Christopher. *The Culture of Narcissism : American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*. New York : Warner Books, 1979.
131. LAWALL, Sarah. *Critics of Consciousness : the Existential Structures of Literature*. Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1968.
132. LEÃO, Liana de Camargo. *Metavisions : Entrances and Exits in Tom Stoppard's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. Curitiba : 1994. 192 p. M.A. Thesis, Universidade Federal do Paraná.
133. LEWIS, Allan. *American Plays and Playwrights*. [S.l.] : Educational Theater Journal, 1964.

134. ———. *The Contemporary Theatre : the Significant Playwrights of Our Time*. New York : Crown Publishers, 1962.
135. LIMA, Luiz Costa. *O Controle do Imaginário : Razão e Imaginação no Ocidente*. São Paulo : Brasiliense, 1984.
136. LITTLE, Stewart W.; CANTOR, Arthur. *The Playmakers*. New York : W. W. Norton & Company, 1970.
137. LUMLEY, Frederick. *New Trends in 20th Century Drama : a Survey Since Ibsen and Shaw*. New York : Oxford University Press, 1972.
138. MARCUS, F. "Theatre: End Games." *Sunday Telegraph*. London : 16 June 1974. p. 16.
139. MEININGER, Jut. *O Sucesso Através da Análise Transacional*. (Trad. Ed Arten). 2. ed. Rio de Janeiro : Artenova, 1974.
140. MERLEAU-PONTY, M. "A Linguagem Indireta e as Vozes do Silêncio." *Os Pensadores*, vol XLI. São Paulo : Abril Cultural, 1975.
141. MOMADAY, N. Scott. "The Man Made of Words." In: FITZ, Earl. *Rediscovering the New World : Inter-American Literature in a Comparative Context*. Iowa City : University of Iowa Press, 1991.
142. MUECKE, D. C. *The Compass of Irony*. London : Methuen, 1969.
143. ———. *Irony and the Ironic*. London : Methuen, 1982.
144. MURCH, A. C. "Eric Berne's Games and Nathalie Serrault's Tropismes." *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 8 (1971), p 62-83.
145. NASH, Walter. *The Language of Humour : Style and Technique in Comic Discourse*. New York : Longman, 1985. (English Language Series).
146. NOVICK, Julius. *Beyond Broadway : the Quest for Permanent Theatres*. New York : Hill & Wang, 1968.
147. *Novos Rumos do Teatro*. Rio de Janeiro : Salvat Editora do Brasil, 1979. (Biblioteca Salvat de Grandes Temas, N. 12).

148. ORR, John. *Tragicomedy and Contemporary Culture : Play and Performance from Beckett to Shepard*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire : MacMillan, 1991. (Edinburgh Studies in Culture and Society).
149. ORTH, Martin. "Reinhard Selten : Prêmio Nobel pela Teoria dos Jogos." *Deutschland : Revista de Política, Cultura, Economia e Ciência*. 6(p2):60-63, dezembro de 1994.
150. OUSBY, Ian. *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*. New Edition. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1993 (reprinted with corrections in 1995).
151. PAZ, Octavio. *The Labyrinth of Solitude : and Other Writings*. (Trans. Lysander Kemp, Yara Milos, and Rachel Phillips Belash). New York : Grove Weidenfeld, 1991.
152. PIRANDELLO, Luigi. "The Art of Humour." *The Massachusetts Review*, 6 : 515-20, Spring/Summer 1965.
153. PIRSIG, Robert M. *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. Paperback ed. New York : Bantam, 1989.
154. PORTER, Thomas E. "Fun and Games in Suburbia : *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*" In: *Myth and Modern American Drama*. Detroit : Wayne State University Press, 1969.
155. RABINOWITZ, P. J. "Truth in Fiction: a Reexamination of Audiences." *Critical Inquiry*, 4 : 121-41, 1977.
156. RAUTER, Herbert. "Edward Albee." In: CHRISTADLER, Martin (Ed.) *Amerikanische Literatur der Gegenwart : in Einzeldarstellungen*. Stuttgart : Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1973.
157. RIFFATERRE, Michael. *A Produção do Texto*. (Trad. Eliane Fitipaldi Pereira Lima de Paiva). São Paulo : Martins Fontes, 1989.
158. ———. *Semiotics of Poetry*. London : Methuen, 1980.
159. ROSE, M. *Parody/Metafiction : an Analysis of Parody as a Critical Mirror to the Writing and Reception of Fiction*. London : Croom Helm, 1979.

160. ROTHSTEIN, B. R. W. *Playing the Game : the Work of Tom Stoppard*. Rhode Island, 1979. 258 p. PhD dissertation, University of Rhode Island.
161. SAID, Edward W. *The World, the Text and the Critic*. Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1983.
162. SALZMAN, Jack (Ed.) *The Cambridge Handbook of American Literature*. New York : Cambridge University Press, 1986.
163. SCHLÜTER, J. *Metafictional Characters in Modern Drama*. New York : Columbia University Press, 1979.
164. SCHOLLES, Robert. *Semiotics and Interpretation*. New Haven & London : Yale University Press, 1982.
165. SELDEN, Samuel. *Theatre Double Game*. Chapel Hill : The University of North Carolina Press, 1969.
166. SHAKESPEARE, William. *Hamlet*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex : Penguin, 1994. (Penguin Popular Classics).
167. SOUZA, Okky de. "Um soco na memória." *Veja*. São Paulo : Abril, 26 de abril de 1995. p. 118-119.
168. SPENDER, Stephen. *Love-Hate Relations : a Study of Anglo-American Sensibilities*. London : Hamish Hamilton, 1974.
169. STEWART, S. *Nonsense : Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature*. London : John Hopkins University Press, 1979.
170. STRINDBERG, August. "Author's Foreword to *Miss Julie*." In: CLARK, B. H. *European Theories of the Drama*. New York : Crown, 1965.
171. ———. "The Bond: a Tragedy in One Act." In: *Seven Plays by August Strindberg*. (Trans. Arvid Paulson). New York : Bantam Books, 1972.
172. ———. "Creditors: a Tragi-Comedy." *Five Plays of Strindberg*. (Trans. Elizabeth Sprigge). New York : Anchor Books, 1960.

173. STYAN, J. L. *The Dark Comedy : the Development of Modern Comic Tragedy*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1962.
174. ———. *The Dramatic Experience : a Guide to the Reading of Plays*. 1. Paperback ed. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1975.
175. ———. *The Elements of Drama*. 1. Paperback ed. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1963.
176. ———. *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice 1 : Realism and Naturalism*. 1. Paperback ed. New York : Cambridge University Press, 1983.
177. SUITS, B. "What is a Game?" *Philosophy of Science*, 34(1967), pp 148-56.
178. SULEIMAN, Susan R. & CROSMAN, Inge. *The Reader in the Text : Essays on Audience and Interpretation*. Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1980.
179. SUTHERLAND, Robert. *Language and Lewis Carroll*. The Hague : Paris, 1970.
180. TAYLOR, John Russell. *A Dictionary of the Theatre*. 3. ed. Harmondsworth, Middlesex : Penguin Books, 1970.
181. TÖRNQVIST, Egil. *Transposing Drama : Studies in Representation*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire : MacMillan Education, 1991.
182. TRILLING, Diana. "The Riddle of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*" In: BIGSBY, C. W. E. (Ed.) *Edward Albee*. Englewood Cliffs, N. J. : Prentice-Hall, 1975.
183. UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO PARANÁ/BIBLIOTECA CENTRAL. *Normas para Apresentação de Trabalhos*. 4. ed. Curitiba : Ed. da UFPR, 1984. 8V.
184. USCATESCU, George. *Teatro Occidental Contemporaneo*. Madrid : Guadarrama, 1968. (Coleccion Punto Omega).
185. USPENSKY, Boris. *A Poetics of Composition*. Berkeley : Univ. of California Press, 1973.

186. VERMILYE, Jerry. *Betty Davis : a Pyramid Illustrated History of the Movies*. New York : Pyramid Books, 1973.
187. WAGER, Walter (Ed.) *The Playwrights Speak*. London : Longmans, Green & Co., 1969.
188. WATLAWICK, Paul; BEAVIN, Janet H.; JACKSON, Don. *Pragmatics of Human Communication : a Study of Interactional Patterns, Pathologies, and Paradoxes*. London : Faber & Faber, 1968.
189. WAUGH, P. *Metafiction : the Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*. London : Methuen, 1984.
190. WEISGERBER, J. "The Use of Quotations in Recent Literature." *Comparative Literature*, 22(1):36-45, Winter, 1970.
191. WHITAKER, T. R. *Fields of Play in Modern Drama*. Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1977.
192. WILDE, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Paperback ed. Harmondsworth, Middlesex : Penguin, 1985.
193. WILLIAMS, J. D. *The Compleat Strategyst : Being a Primer to the Theory of Games*. New York : McGraw-Hill, 1964.
194. WILLIAMS, Tennessee. *A Streetcar Named Desire*. In: ———. *Sweet Bird of Youth and Other Plays*. Paperback ed. Harmondsworth, Middlesex : Penguin, 1971. (Penguin Plays).
195. WILSON, Garff B. *Three Hundred Years of American Drama and Theatre : From Ye Bare and Ye Cubb to Hair*. Englewood Cliffs, N. J. : Prentice-Hall, 1973.
196. WITTGENSTEIN, Ludwig. *Investigações Filosóficas*. (Trad. José Carlos Bruni). São Paulo : Abril Cultural, 1975. (Os Pensadores).
197. WRIGHT, Edmond. "Derrida, Searle, Contexts, Games, Riddles." *New Literary History : a Journal of Theory and Interpretation*. Vol XIII, 2, Spring 1982. Baltimore : John Hopkins University Press, 1982.
198. YOUNG, Robert (Ed.) *Untying the Text : a Post-Structuralist Reader*. 2. ed. London : Routledge, 1990.

199. ZINI JR., Álvaro Antônio. “Nobel de Economia Foi Para Teoria dos Jogos.” *Folha de São Paulo* : Domingo, 23 de outubro de 1994, 2, p.5 (finanças).
200. ZOLA, Émile. “Naturalism in the Theatre.” (Trans. Albert Bermel). In: BENTLEY, E. *The Theory of the Modern Stage : an Introduction to Modern Theatre and Drama*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex : Penguin Books, 1990. p. 351-372.

OTHER WORKS CONSULTED

"Albee, Edward Franklin," Microsoft (R) Encarta. Copyright (c). 1994 Funk & Wagnalls Corporation.

Beyond the Forest. Director: King Vidor. Warner Bros., 1949. Screenplay by Lenore Coffee based on story by Stuart Engstrand. Cast: Bette Davis, Joseph Cotten, David Brian, Ruth Norman, Minor Watson, Dona Drake, Regis Toomey.

"Shape of my Heart." Song by Sting. In: *Ten Summoner's Tales*. Hollywood: A&M Records Inc., 1993.

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?. Directed by Mike Nichols. Production and script by Ernest Lehman (1966). Starring Elizabeth Taylor, Richard Burton, George Segal and Sandy Dennis. Photography by Haskell Wexler. Music by Alex North. Artistic direction by Richard Silbert and George J. Hopkins. With this film Miss Taylor and Miss Dennis won the Oscar Award as Best Actress and Best Actress in a Supporting Role, respectively, in 1967.